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Apostolic optimism

APOSTOLIC OPTIMISM

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BY

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APOSTOLIC OPTIMISM, VIII

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[An Address on preaching delivered before the Free Church Congress, Cardiff, March 1901.]

APOSTOLIC OPTIMISM

I

APOSTOLIC OPTIMISM

"Rejoicing in hope."—ROMANS xii. 12.

THAT is a characteristic expression of the fine, genial optimism of the Apostle Paul. His eyes are always illumined. The cheery tone is never absent from his speech. The buoyant and springy movement of his life is never changed. The light never dies out of his sky. Even the grey firmament reveals more hopeful tints, and becomes significant of evolving glory. The apostle is an optimist, "rejoicing in hope," a child of light wearing the "armour of light," "walking in the light" even as Christ is in the light.

This apostolic optimism was not a thin and fleeting sentiment begotten of a cloudless summer day. It was not the creation of a season; it was the permanent pose of the spirit. Even when beset with circumstances which to the world would spell defeat, the apostle moved with the mien of a conqueror. He never lost the kingly posture. He was disturbed by no timidity about ultimate issues. He fought and laboured in the spirit of certain triumph. "We are always confident." "We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us." "Thanks be unto God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

This apostolic optimism was not born of sluggish thinking, or of idle and shallow observation. I am very grateful that the counsel of my text lifts its chaste and cheery flame in the 12th chapter of an epistle of which the first chapter contains as dark and searching an indictment of our nature as the mind of man has ever drawn. Let me rehearse the appalling catalogue, that the radiance of the apostle's optimism may appear the more abounding: "Senseless hearts," "fools," "uncleanness," "vile passions," "reprobate minds," "unrighteousness, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, whisperers, backbiters, hateful to God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil things, without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, unmerciful." With fearless severity the apostle leads us through the black realms of midnight and eclipse. And yet in the subsequent reaches of the great argument, of which these dark regions form the preface, there emerges the clear, calm, steady light of my optimistic text. I say it is not the buoyancy of ignorance. It is not the flippant, light-hearted expectancy of a man who knows nothing about the secret places of the night. The counsellor is a man who has steadily gazed at light at its worst, who has digged through the outer walls of convention and respectability, who has pushed his way into the secret chambers and closets of the life, who has dragged out the slimy sins which were lurking in their holes, and named them after their kind—it is this man who when he has surveyed the dimensions of evil and misery and contempt, merges his dark indictment in a cheery and expansive dawn, in an optimistic evangel, in which he counsels his fellow-disciples to maintain the confident attitude of a rejoicing hope.

1. Now what are the secrets of this courageous and energetic optimism? Perhaps, if we explore the life of this great apostle, and seek to discover its springs, we may find the clue to his abounding hope. Roaming then through the entire records of his life and teachings, do we discover any significant emphasis? Pre-eminent above all other suggestions, I am impressed with his vivid sense of

the reality of the redemptive work of Christ. Turn where I will, the redemptive work of the Christ evidences itself as the base and groundwork of his life. It is not only that here and there are solid statements of doctrine, wherein some massive argument is constructed for the partial unveiling of redemptive glory. Even in those parts of his epistles where formal argument has ceased, and where solid doctrine is absent, the doctrine flows as a fluid element into the practical convictions of life, and determines the shape and quality of the judgments. Nay, one might legitimately use the figure of a finer medium still, and say that in all the spacious reaches of the apostle's life the redemptive work of his Master is present as an atmosphere in which all his thoughts and purposes and labours find their sustaining and enriching breath. Take this epistle to the Romans in which my text is found. The earlier stages of the great epistle are devoted to a massive and stately presentation of the doctrines of redemption. But when I turn over the pages where the majestic argument is concluded, I find the doctrine persisting in a diffused and rarefied form, and appearing as the determining factor in the solution of practical problems. If he is dealing with the question of the "eating of meats" the great doctrine reappears, and interposes its solemn and yet elevating principle: "destroy not him with thy meat for whom Christ died." If he is called upon to administer rebuke to the passionate and unclean, the shadow of the Cross rests upon his judgment. "Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price." If he is pourtraying the ideal relationship of husband and wife, he sets it in the light of redemptive glory:—"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself up for it." If he is seeking to cultivate the grace of liberality, he brings the heavenly air round about the spirit. "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor." It interweaves itself with all his salutations. It exhales in all his benedictions like a hallowing fragrance. You cannot get away from it. In the light of the glory of redemption all relationships are assorted and arranged. Redemption was not degraded into a fine abstract argument, to which the apostle had appended his own approval, and then, with sober satisfaction, had laid it aside, as a practical irrelevancy, in the stout chests of mental orthodoxy. It became the very spirit of his life. It was, if I may be allowed the violent figure, the warm blood in all his judgment.

It filled the veins of all his thinking. It beat like a pulse in all his purposes. It determined and vitalised his decisions in the crisis, as well as in the lesser trifles of the common day. His conception of redemption was regulative of all his thought.

But it is not only the immediacy of redemption in the apostle's thought by which I am impressed. I stand in awed amazement before its vast, far-stretching reaches into the eternities. Said an old villager to me concerning the air of his elevated hamlet, " Aye, sir, it's a fine air is this westerly breeze ; I like to think of it as having travelled from the distant fields of the Atlantic ! " And here is the Apostle Paul, with the quickening wind of redemption blowing about him in loosening, vitalising, strengthening influence, and to him, in all his thinking, it had its birth in the distant fields of eternity ! To the apostle redemption was not a small device, an after-thought, a patched-up expedient to meet an unforeseen emergency. The redemptive purpose lay back in the abyss of the eternities, and in a spirit of reverent questioning the apostle sent his trembling thoughts into those lone and silent fields. He emerged with whispered secrets such as those : " fore-knew," " fore-ordained," " chosen in Him before the foundation of the world," "eternal life promised before times eternal," "the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Brethren, does our common thought of redemptive glory reach back into this august and awful presence? Does the thought of the modern disciple journey in this distant pilgrimage? Or do we now regard it as unpractical and irrelevant? There is no more insidious peril in modern religious life than the debasement of our conception of the practical. If we divorce the practical from the sublime, the practical will become the superficial, and will degenerate into a very lean and forceless thing. When Paul went on this lonely pilgrimage his spirit acquired the posture of a finely sensitive reverence. People who live and move beneath great domes acquire a certain calm and stately dignity. It is in companionship with the sublimities that awkwardness and coarseness are destroyed. We lose our reverence when we desert the august. But has reverence no relationship to the practical? Shall we discard it as an irrelevant factor in the wealthy purposes of common life? Why, reverence is the very clue to fruitful, practical living. Reverence is creative of hope; nay, a more definite emphasis can be given to the assertion; reverence is a constituent of hope. Annihilate reverence, and life loses its fine sensitiveness, and when sensitiveness goes out of a life the hope that remains is only a flippant rashness, a thoughtless impetuosity, the careless onrush of the kine, and not a firm assured perception of a triumph that is only delayed. A reverent homage before the sublimities of yesterday is the condition of a fine perception of the hidden triumphs of the morrow. And, therefore, I do not regard it as an accidental conjunction that the Psalmist puts them together, and proclaims the evangel that "the Lord taketh pleasure in them that *fear* Him, in them that *hope* in His mercy." To feel the days before me I must revere the purpose which throbs behind me. I must bow in reverence if I would anticipate in hope.

Here, then, is the Apostle Paul, with the redemptive purpose interweaving itself with all the entanglements of his common life, a purpose reaching back into the awful depths of the eternities, and issuing from those depths in amazing fulness of grace and glory. No one can be five minutes in the companionship of the Apostle Paul without discovering how wealthy is his sense of the wealthy, redeeming ministry of God. What a wonderful consciousness he has of the sweep and fulness of the divine grace! You know the variations of the glorious air: "the unsearchable riches of Christ"; "riches in glory in Christ Jesus"; "all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ"; "the riches of His goodness and forbearance and long-suffering." The redemptive purpose of God bears upon the life of the apostle and upon the race whose privileges he shares, not in an uncertain and reluctant shower, but in a great and marvellous flood. And what to him is the resultant enfranchisement? What are the spacious issues of the glorious work? Do you recall those wonderful sentences, scattered here and there about the apostle's writings, and beginning with the words "but now"? Each sentence proclaims the end of the dominion of night, and unveils some glimpse of the new created day. "But now!" It is a phrase that heralds a great deliverance! "But now, apart from the law the righteousness of God hath been manifested." "But now, being made free from sin and become servants to God." "But now in Christ Jesus ye that once were far off are made nigh in the blood of Christ." "But now are ye light in the Lord." "Now, no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." These represent no thin abstractions. To Paul the realities of which they speak were more real than the firm and solid earth. And is it any wonder that a man with such a magnificent sense of the reality of the redemptive works of Christ, who felt the eternal purpose throbbing in the dark backward and abyss of time, who conceived it operating upon our race in floods of grace and glory, and who realised in his own immediate consciousness the varied wealth of the resultant emancipation—is it any wonder that for this man a new day had dawned, and the birds had begun to sing and the flowers to bloom, and a sunny optimism had taken possession of his heart which found expression in an assured and rejoicing hope?

2. I look abroad again over the record of this man's life and teachings, if perchance I may discover the secrets of his abiding optimism, and I am profoundly impressed by his living sense of the reality and greatness of his present resources. "By Christ redeemed!" Yes, but that is only the Alpha and not the Omega of the work of grace. "By Christ redeemed!" That is not a grand finale; it is only a glorious inauguration. "By Christ redeemed; in Christ restored"; it is with these dynamics of restoration that his epistles are so wondrously abounding. In almost every

other sentence he suggests a dynamic which he can count upon as his friend. Paul's mental and spiritual outlook comprehended a great army of positive forces labouring in the interests of the Kingdom of God. His conception of life was amazingly rich in friendly dynamics! I do not wonder that such a wealthy consciousness was creative of a triumphant optimism. Just glance at some of the apostle's auxiliaries: "Christ liveth in me!" "Christ liveth in me! He breathes through all my aspirations. He thinks through all my thinking. He wills through all my willing. He loves through all my loving. He travails in all my labours. He works within me 'to will and to do of His good pleasure.'" That is the primary faith of the hopeful life. But see what follows in swift and immediate succession. "If Christ is in you, the spirit is life." "The spirit is life!" And therefore you find that in the apostle's thought dispositions are powers. They are not passive entities. They are positive forces vitalising and energising the common life of men. My brethren, I am persuaded there is a perilous leakage in this department of our thought. We are not bold enough in our thinking concerning spiritual realities. We do not associate with every mode of the consecrated spirit the mighty energy of God. We too often oust from our practical calculations some of the strongest and most aggressive allies of the saintly life. Meekness is more than the absence of self-assertion; it is the manifestation of the mighty power of God. To the Apostle Paul love expressed more than a relationship. It was an energy productive of abundant labours. Faith was more than an attitude. It was an energy creative of mighty endeavour. Hope was more than a posture. It was an energy generative of a most enduring patience. All these are dynamics, to be counted as active allies, co-operating in the ministry of the kingdom. And so the epistles abound in the recital of mystic ministries at work. The Holy Spirit worketh! Grace worketh! Faith worketh! Love worketh! Hope worketh! Prayer worketh! And there are other allies robed in less attractive garb. "Tribulation worketh!" "This light affliction worketh." "Godly sorrow worketh!" On every side of him the apostle conceives co-operative and friendly powers. "The mountain is full of horses and chariots of fire round about him." He exults in the consciousness of abounding resources. He discovers the friends of God in things which find no place among the scheduled powers of the world. He finds God's raw material in the world's discarded waste. "Weak things," "base things," "things that are despised," "things that are not," mere nothings; among these he discovers the operating agents of the mighty God. Is it any wonder that in this man, possessed of such a wealthy consciousness of multiplied resources, the spirit of a cheery optimism should be enthroned? With what stout confidence he goes into the fight! He never mentions the enemy timidly. He never seeks to underestimate his strength. Nay, again and again he catalogues all possible antagonisms in a spirit of buoyant and exuberant triumph. However numerous the enemy, however subtle and aggressive his devices, however towering and well-established the iniquity, however black the gathering clouds, so sensitive is the apostle to the wealthy resources of God that amid it all he remains a sunny optimist, "rejoicing in hope," labouring in the spirit of a conqueror even when the world was exulting in his supposed discomfiture and defeat.

3. And, finally, in searching for the springs of this man's optimism, I place alongside his sense of the reality of redemption and his wealthy consciousness of present resources, his impressive

sense of the reality of future glory. Paul gave himself time to think of heaven, of the home of God, of his own home when time should be no more. He loved to contemplate "the glory that shall be revealed." He mused in wistful expectancy of the day "when Christ who is our life shall be manifested," and when we also "shall be manifested with Him in glory." He pondered the thought of death as "gain," as transferring him to conditions in which he would be "at home with the Lord," "with Christ, which is far better." He looked for "the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ," and he contemplated "that great day" as the "henceforth," which would reveal to him the crown of righteousness and glory. Is any one prepared to dissociate this contemplation from the apostle's cheery optimism? Is not rather the thought of coming glory one of its abiding springs? Can we safely exile it from our moral and spiritual culture? I know that this particular contemplation is largely absent from modern religious life, and I know the nature of the recoil in which our present impoverishment began. "Let us hear less about the mansions of the blest, and more about the housing of the poor!" Men revolted against an effeminate contemplation, which had run to seed, in favour of an active philanthropy which sought the enrichment of the common life. But, my brethren, pulling a plant up and throwing it upon the dung-heap is not the only way of saving it from running to seed. You can accomplish by a wise restriction what is wastefully done by severe destruction. I think we have lost immeasurably by the uprooting, in so many lives, of this plant of heavenly contemplation. We have built on the erroneous assumption that the contemplation of future glory inevitably unfits us for the service of man. It is an egregious and destructive mistake. I do not think that Richard Baxter's labours were thinned or impoverished by his contemplation of "the saints' everlasting rest." When I consider his mental output, his abundant labours as Father-confessor to a countless host, his pains and persecutions and imprisonments, I cannot but think he received some of the powers of his optimistic endurance from contemplations such as he counsels in his incomparable book. "Run familiarly through the streets of the heavenly Jerusalem; visit the patriarchs and prophets, salute the apostles, and admire the armies of martyrs; lead on the heart from street to street, bring it into the palace of the great King; lead it, as it were, from chamber to chamber. Say to it, 'Here must I lodge, here must I die, here must I praise, here must I love and be loved. My tears will then be wiped away, my groans be turned to another tune, my cottage of clay be changed to this palace, my prison rags to these splendid robes'; 'for the former things are passed away.'" I cannot think that Samuel Rutherford impoverished his spirit or deadened his affections, or diminished his labours by mental pilgrimages such as he counsels to Lady Cardoness:—"Go up beforehand and see your lodging. Look through all your Father's rooms in Heaven. Men take a sight of the lands ere they buy them. I know that Christ hath made the bargain already; but be kind to the house ye are going to, and see it often." I cannot think that this would imperil the fruitful optimisms of the Christian life. I often examine, with peculiar interest, the hymn-book we use at Carr's Lane. It was compiled by Dr. Dale. Nowhere else can I find the broad perspective of his theology and his primary help-meets in the devotional life as I find them there. And is it altogether unsuggestive that under the heading of "Heaven" is to be found one of the largest sections of the book. A greater space is given to "Heaven" than is given to "Christian duty." Is it not significant of what a great man of affairs found needful for the enkindling and sustenance of a courageous hope? And among the hymns are many which have helped to nourish the sunny endeavours of a countless host.

There is a land of pure delight
Where saints immortal reign;
Infinite day excludes the night,
And pleasures banish pain.

What are these, arrayed in white,
Brighter than the noonday sun?
Foremost of the suns of light,
Nearest the eternal throne.

Hark! hark, my soul! Angelic songs are swelling
O'er earth's green fields and ocean's wave-beat shore.
Angelic songs to sinful men are telling
Of that new life when sin shall be no more.

My brethren, depend upon it, we are not impoverished by contemplations such as these. They take no strength out of the hand, and they put much strength and buoyancy into the heart. I proclaim the contemplation of coming glory as one of the secrets of the apostle's optimism which enabled him to labour and endure in the confident spirit of rejoicing hope. These, then, are some of the springs of Christian optimism; some of the sources in which we may nourish our hope in the newer labours of a larger day:—a sense of the glory of the past in a perfected redemption, a sense of the glory of the present in our multiplied resources, a sense of the glory of to-morrow in the fruitful rest of our eternal home.

> O, blessed hope! with this elate
> Let not our hearts be desolate;
> But, strong in faith and patience, wait
> Until He come!

Jowett has a 3 pt sermon w intro & conclusion
all up to the last pt he talks about the
text, xt, Paul & scriptural references.
pt 3 he brings it to the heaven, but does
not invoke him too much.

This is not one of the deeper needs
to which he could address himself.

He takes one verse, or part of it to
set his theme, but goes beyond it, using
other text, yet adhering to it. A good
type of sermon.

II

THE TRUE IMPERIALISM

"Ho, every one that thirsteth!"—ISAIAH lv.

WHO are those thirsty souls, panting for a satisfaction which they do not find? They are the people of the hill-country, now exiled to the plains. They have been bereft of the companionable apocalypse of the heights, and they are now immured in the unsuggestive monotony of the plains. The heights abounded in speech. The plains are silent. There is not a single helpful figure in the entire Bible borrowed from the plains. The plains lie prone as a speechless sphinx. The hill-country is full of voices, loud in intimations and revelations. Its phenomena are the messengers of the infinite. There towers the rugged height, firm and immovable, standing sure and steadfast through the fickle and varied years. What is its suggestion? "Thy righteousness is like the great mountains." Yonder come the treasure-laden clouds, driving in from the great sea. They unburden their wealth upon the shoulders of Carmel, clothing it with a garment of rare and luxuriant beauty. What is their significance? "Thy mercy reached even unto the clouds." Here, on these bare, basaltic heights, the tired and heated traveller rests in the cool and healing shadow of a friendly rock. What is the speech of the shadow? "He that dwelleth in this secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."

All things are but the vestures and vehicles of larger things of spiritual import. The light, soft wind that stirs and breathes in the dawn—it is God who rides upon a cherub, yea, who "flies upon the wings of the wind." The gentle, mollifying rain falling upon the parched, bruised, bleeding stems of the newly-cut grass: "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass." The end of the drought; the unsealing of the springs among the hills; the gladsome sound of the river as it laughs and dances down the bare and rocky gorge: "Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures." It was an expressive, voiceful land. Its features interpreted the face and character of God. Land and people were in communion, and their intercourse concerned the nearness and the favour and the providence of the Lord of Hosts. But now the land and the people are divorced. The people are borne away into captivity. They leave the hill-country, so rich in interpreting speech, and they pass into the speechless monotony of the plains. Their environment is dumb. Their dwelling-place is no longer a sacrament. It is common and insignificant. They have passed from nature to art and artifice. They have left the shepherd, and met the merchant. The quiet labours of the pasture and the vineyard are effaced by the pompous show and glitter of a swift and feverish civilisation. Away in the hill-country the lanes were flooded with rivers of sheep. Look through the symbols of Ezekiel, and you can see the streets and lanes of the exile: "chariots like whirlwinds," "horses swifter than eagles," "horses and chariots," "horsemen with spears and burnished helmets," "wheels" and "wheels" and "wheels," all suggesting the street rush and the irresistible power of the triumphant city. Go into the book of Daniel, and you can hear its gaiety and its revelry: "the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer." You can see its rivers, broad and brimming, the rivers by which the exiles sat down and wept. You can see its spacious estuary, the "desert of the sea," the "great sea," crowded with shipping, laden with the produce of India and Arabia, and the wealth of distant Britain. Ezekiel has described it as a "land of traffic," a "city of merchants," keen, intense, open-eyed, and pushful. The emphasis of its life gathered round about its trade. Its energy was bent upon acquisition and expansion. "Their cry was in their ships."

Now, take the people of the bracing, speaking hill-country, and immure them in this sweltering and superficial plain. In all the crowded interests there was nothing suggestive of God. In all the rushing, hurrying movements there was nothing significant of the coming and going of God. There was grandeur, but the grandeur had no voice. It was grandeur without revelation, and grandeur without revelation is never creative of awe. Where there is no awe, men step with flippant tread. The exile felt the glamour, but in the glamour forgot his God. The glitter allured him. The snake breathed out its tinted bubbles, and he followed in pursuit. He became a trafficker, and plunged his soul in trade. The instinct of the dealer rapidly matured. His eyes became heated with ever-increasing lust. His vision was more and more horizontal, and less and less vertical. The fever of the conqueror infected the captive. The spirit of Babylon entered into Israel. Success was enthroned in place of holiness, and the soul bowed down and worshipped it. The exile embraced the world, and shut out the infinite.

Now, what was the issue of that? The exile made money. He increased it by increased trade. He amassed possessions. His body revelled in conditions of ease. His carnal appetites delighted themselves in fatness. He climbed into positions of eminence and power. What else? "In the fulness of his sufficiency he was in straits." The body luxuriated; the soul languished. He drenched the body with comforts; he couldn't appease its tenant. "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up . . . eat, drink, and be merry!" And still the soul cried out, "I thirst," and disturbed him like an unquiet ghost. He spent money and more money, but was never able to buy the appropriate bread. He plunged into increased labours, but his labours reaped only that "which satisfied not." The body toiled, the brain schemed, the eyes coveted, and still the soul cried out, "I thirst.

Now, brethren, when there sits in the soul a hungry unrest and a feverish thirst, life will drop into faintness and weariness. You remember that striking conjunction in the first of the Psalms: "He shall be like a tree planted by rivers of water. . . . His leaf also shall not wither." That is a beautiful sequence. When there is no thirst at the roots there shall be no withering of the leaf. What is the leaf? The leaf is the early thing, the spring growth, the beauty of the childhood of the year. And what is the leaf in human life? The first thing, the thing of the spring, the beauty of the earliest days. And what is the beauty of childhood? Surely its hopefulness, its trustfulness, its love. These are the spring-leaves of human life. "His leaf shall not wither." Even on into the autumn-time his leaf shall still be green. In old age he shall still be hopeful, trustful, loveful. No thirst at the roots; no withering of the leaf. But suppose there is thirst at the roots? Then life shall faint and droop. The fresh green thing shall fade away. The leaf shall wither. Hope shall wither into pessimism. Faith shall wither into cynicism. Love shall wither into misanthropy. And, brethren, where the leaf has drooped the life becomes weary. All things become stale, flat, and unprofitable. We "spend our money for that which is not bread, and we labour for that which satisfieth not."

"All is vanity and vexation of spirit." The soul which is unmoved in the finite feeds itself upon wind. We run and are weary; we walk and are faint.

Has all this no pertinency for our own day? Is the snake triumphant in our time? Are our people in pursuit of the bubble? Is our vision entirely horizontal? Which is predominant—aspiration or ambition? Which is more coveted—success or holiness? Would it be an altogether irrelevant quotation to apply the words of the text to our own people, and to say that we "spend our money for that which is not bread, and we labour for that which satisfieth not"? Acquisition and expansion are the primary notes of modern life. The lust of gold and the lust of empire are the twin ambitions of our time. The personal and the national glory-business, both appear to be briskly pushed. And is there no thirst, no disquietude of spirit, no vague unrest, no drooping leaf? Are there no weary feet? Do you find the green leaf in our literature, or is our literature pervaded by a faint and weary spirit? I should not go to our novels if I wished to find a strong and fruitful rest. Nor do I think our poetry moves amid the "still dews of quietness," and the composure of an optimistic faith. Our novels and our poetry are full of the drooping leaf. Behind the droop there is the thirst. The literature reflects the people. Business circles abound in faint and weary men. They get and spend, and spend and get, but through it all persists the inward thirst. They toil and tire, but their labour satisfieth not. At the end of the feast the hunger is unappeased. What is the explanation? "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Thou hast rivers of pleasure!" "I thirst." "Thou hast abundance of goods." "I hunger." What is to be the remedy? Where is the satisfaction to be found?

> Where is the singer, whose large note and clear
> Can heal and arm and plenish and sustain?

So cries William Watson, and I want no better words with which to express the need. A faint and weary people is in need of some one who can "heal and arm and plenish and sustain," but that some one will not be found in a singer, however large and clear his note, but in a Saviour; not in a gift of poetry, but in the gift of life; not in any inspired man, but in the infinitely gracious ministries of an unveiled God.

"Ho, every one that thirsteth!" That is

a call to the faint and the weary. What is he to do? "Incline your ear." "Hearken diligently unto me." First of all there has to be a discipline of the ear. There has to be a determined and resolute effort to listen to God. "Hear, ye deaf." You know the space which these injunctions fill in the sacred Book. On every page there sounds the cry of the herald, "Hearken!" "Listen!" "Incline your ear." How often our Master repeated the phrase, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." The counsel is urgent, sharp, strenuous, as though shouted to a man in the gravest peril: "Let him hear!" The voices of the world are so plausible, so fascinating, so easily seducing, that if a man is to catch the higher voice he must set himself in the resolute act of attention. "Hearken diligently unto me." Put some work into your listening! In the senate, in the council-house, on the exchange, behind the counter, in the study, in the pulpit, be intent on hearing the highest, and incline your ear unto God. Many clamorous voices will call you from beneath—Mr. Worldly Wiseman, Mr. Pliable, Mr. Time-Server, Mr. Love-the-World — but pull yourself together, and intently listen, that through the noisy clamour you may hear the upward callings of your God.

"Hearken diligently unto me." For the individual and for the nation the discipline of the ear is the first step to the attainment of a strong, restful, unwearied, and satisfying life.

What is the next step? The discipline of the ear is to be accompanied by the discipline of the heart. Listen, and then yield. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts." Right hearing necessitates strong and unequivocal doing. Know, and then dare! Hear the highest, and then uncompromisingly obey it. "Yes, but that is impossible!" Ah, you remember what Robert South said: "It is idleness that creates impossibilities." That is very true. When men make a real work of their religion, impossibilities melt away into glorious practicalities. When Richard Cobden began his agitation for the repeal of the Corn Laws, he was met on every hand with the objection that he was attempting the impossible. "Impossible," said Cobden; "if that is the only objection it can soon be done." I think that perhaps one of the greatest needs of the world to-day is that some great nation, having heard the voice of the highest, shall stand forward and resolutely attempt the impossible. Let her begin by divesting herself of all unclean habits, of everything that is tricky and perfidious and subtle and selfish and false. "Let the wicked forsake her ways." Let her strip herself of all sordid ambitions, of all mean purposes, of all sneaking policies and small conceits. "Let the unrighteous forsake her thoughts." Let her "hearken diligently" to the divine, and determinedly follow in pursuit, even when the way of pursuit appears to lead to impossible heights. Let her "return to the Lord," and be no longer a democracy, or an aristocracy, or a plutocracy, but a theocracy, willingly and gladly counselled and governed by Jehovah, Lord of Hosts.

What would be the issues of such obedience? They are unfolded for us in this chapter with wondrous prodigality. First of all, there is the assured promise of a fuller life. "Your *soul* shall live." "Your *soul!*" Hitherto life has been a thin existence, a mere surface glitter, a superficial movement. Now, vitality shall awaken in undreamed-of depths. "Your soul shall live." Life shall no longer be confined to the channels of the appetites, to mere sensations, to the outer halls and passages of the sacred house. "Your soul shall live." The unused shall be aroused and exercised. Unevolved faculty shall be unpacked. Benumbed instincts shall be liberated. Barren powers of discernment shall troop from their graves. New intelligences shall be born. The ocean of iniquity shall ebb, and "the sea shall give up its dead"! "Your soul shall live." Life shall be no longer scant and scrimpy. Your soul shall "delight itself in fatness." Every tissue shall be fed. Weakness shall depart with the famine. "The people that do know their God shall be strong." The tree of its life shall bear all manner of fruits, and "the leaves of the tree shall be for the healing of the nations." Mark the succession. Here is a people, diligently listening to the highest, and as diligently yielding to it. The inevitable issue is a deepened, enriched, and glorified life. "Your soul shall live." See, now, the further issue. "Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knewest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee, because of the Lord thy God, for He hath glorified thee." What does that mean? It means that a true and glorified natural life is to create a true and glorified Imperialism. "Nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the Lord thy God."

That is the true imperialism—empire by moral and spiritual sovereignty, allurement and dominion by the fascinating radiance of a pure and sanctified life. "Gentiles shall come to thy *light*, and kings to the brightness of thy rising." What is the vulgar imperialism of to-day? It is empire by grab. It is expansion by coercion. It is aggrandisement by the power of the sword. Mark the contrast. "Nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the Lord thy God." Such is to be the imperial gravitation of a people exalted and inspired by the purifying and energising presence of the Eternal God. This, I repeat, is the true imperialism, the imperialism which I covet for my nation; the glory which constitutes a fadeless dignity; empire—not by the aid of Maxim guns, but by great and heartening evangels proceeding from a redeemed and glorified people. When are we going to learn that this is the shining goal of all worthy national ambition? The mission of a truly great people is to be "a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander to the peoples," a "witness," ceaselessly reiterating the glad tidings of the eternal love which she herself has proved in the power of her own redemption; a "leader," a pathfinder, going out among the benighted peoples who are groping blindly for the way that leads to liberty and light, and revealing unto them the road whose entrance-gate is the beginning of the gladsome dawn; a "commander," commanding her willing and waiting servants to go here, there, and yonder, bearing her shining lines through all the earth, and her words to the end of the world. "Thou shalt be called the restorer of paths to dwell in." That is a glorious title, and it describes a glorious mission, the inevitable mission of a great nation which has "hearkened diligently" unto God, and has surrendered herself to a glad and invincible obedience. "Her soul shall live," and her life shall be "the light of men." A splendid magnanimity! Now, mark the further issues in this radiant sequence. A true imperialism is to be accompanied by a splendid magnanimity. Littlemindedness is to be supplanted by clean and spacious ambition. The pure and exalted people is to be partaker of the sublime thoughts and purposes of God. "My thoughts are not your thoughts." What are Thy thoughts like, O Lord? "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my thoughts higher than your thoughts." The thoughts of the Eternal are characterised by loftiness, by breadth, by comprehensiveness, by an all-inclusive sympathy which vibrates to the interests of each, as though each contained, as indeed it does, the welfare of the whole. The truly imperial people is to share this spacious and inclusive thought. Small parochial prejudices and petty peddling ambitions will give way to wide-seeing and far-embracing sympathy. A sterile individualism will yield to a pregnant altruism. A mean and feverish patriotism will be supplanted by a generous and fructifying cosmopolitanism. The annexation of territories will be regarded as infinitely inferior to the salvation of the world. Influence will not be measured by miles, but by magnanimity; empire will not be computed by so many leagues of earth, but by the multitude of redeemed and liberated souls; the outskirts of sovereignty will not be defined by bristling guns, but "thou shalt call her walls Salvation, and her gates Praise." "As the heavens are high above the earth," so shall thy thoughts be exalted above the low-lying purposes of carnal policy and merely material ambition.

And now note the climax of the sequence. All this exalted and glorified character, this true imperialism, this splendid magnanimity, is to issue in a rich, assured, and beautiful ministry. There is to be nothing wavering and uncertain about the moral empire and sovereignty of such a people. Its healthy and health-giving ministry shall be inevitable. "As the rain cometh down, and the snow, from heaven, . . . and watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud; so . . ." The inevitableness of the national ministry shall be leagued with the inevitableness of the budding and beautifying spring. The purified people shall discharge the mission of spring-maker among the peoples of the world. Its goings and its comings shall not be creative of destruction and distress. It shall be the creator of gladness and music and song. "The mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands." "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree"; "the thorn"—with its sharp, piercing, pain-giving spikes; the "fir tree"—from which were made the musical instruments, and especially the framework of the harp; "instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree"; the glorified people shall move among the scattered peoples, and shall exercise the beautiful ministry of changing the creators of pain into the makers of melody and praise. "Instead of the brier," with its bitter, poisonous sting, "shall come up the myrtle tree," with its glossy leaves, and white flowers, and grateful perfume. "Instead of the brier the myrtle tree!" The redeemed and consecrated nation shall exult in a missionary enterprise which shall change the poisonous enmities and jealousies of the people into the perfume of sweet and gracious sentiments, and the chastened delights of a brief and blameless life.

A full life, a true imperialism, a splendid magnanimity, an inevitably beautiful ministry—this is to be the heritage of a nation which is surrendered to the call of the Highest, and which is rooted by the "river of water of life." It is an ambition which we well might covet for our own nation, a consummation for which we might all devoutly pray. May the good Lord draw our people to the springs! May we turn from our faintness and weariness to "the river of God's pleasures." "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!" "Let him that heareth say, Come; let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."

III

"BEWARE OF THE DOGS"

"Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the concision: for we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."—PHILIPPIANS iii. 2, 3.

"BEWARE! Beware! Beware! For:" . . . There we have an urgent warning associated with a primary truth. On the one hand are things to be avoided; on the other hand are things to be pursued. The text enshrines the presentation of a contrast—on one side dark, forbidding, and revolting; on the other side radiant and alluring. "Beware of the dogs; beware of the evil workers; beware of the concision." There is no mincing sensitiveness in the apostle's speech. "Beware of the dogs." Has the apostle temporarily lost his delicate courtesy, and have his heated feelings led him into the use of a somewhat coarse and violent speech? Look at the suggestion of the figure. The dog of the Eastern city was a homeless outcast, sniffing in accumulated garbage with the intent of finding its food. Its home was the street. Its food was the refuse. Now, that is how the Jew thought about the Gentile. He was a dog. He had no home privilege in God. He was an outcast. He was a tenant of the streets, and he fed upon the crumbs which were thrown out from the more favoured nation's table. The Jew was the home-child; the Gentile was the creature of the gutter! That is how "the circumcised" felt and thought and spoke about "the uncircumcised," and they carried their conceptions even into the domain of the Christian Church. The circumcised Christian conceived himself as being in the home of the Lord, and he regarded the uncircumcised as being in the streets. And now Paul takes up the figure, and reverses the application. "Nay, nay!" cried the apostle, "*you* are living in the outsides of things. You are magnifying ceremonies and ordinances and institutions. You are dwelling in the external. Yes, *you* are in the streets! *You* are the dogs. You are moving in the narrow channels of the senses, when you might abide in the spacious home of the spirit. You are picking up the crumbs when you might sit down to the feast, You are the dogs. Beware of the dogs!"

"Beware of the evil workers!" the spies, working so subtly, so insidiously, so speciously, with the purpose of bringing you into the bondage of an external ceremonialism. They will promise you home-life, while in reality they lead you into street-life; out of the spirit into the flesh; transforming you from children of liberty and festival into dogs, creatures of bondage and restraint. "Beware of the evil workers!"

"Beware of the concision!" There the apostle uses more pointed and definite speech. "Beware of the concision!" Beware of those who imagine that by "concising," by excising a little flesh, they fulfil the conditions which entitle them to the plenteous heritage of the Kingdom of Grace. Beware of those who imagine that by merely curbing the flesh they can become heirs to a spiritual kingdom. "Beware of the concision."

"Beware of the dogs; beware of the evil workers; beware of the concision." What is all this but a solemn and urgent warning against externalism, against all dependence upon outward ordinance and form? It is a grave reminder, that it is possible for a professing Christian to be an inhabitant of the streets, and to be satisfied with the scrappy and precarious living of a dog. It is a powerful protest against mere religious outwardness by a man who had experienced the mighty suctions of its temptations, and who knew the compromising inclinations of the human heart. Is the protest inopportune in our own time? Is it an interesting relic of a submerged antiquity? Is this Epistle to the Philippians fusty and musty, with the rank smell of a primitive day, or may we regard it as a contemporary document with pertinent applications to our own time? Is there any danger that our souls should live the vagrant life of the streets, and mistake the streets for the home? May we come to regard a ceremony as our Father's house? May we through formalism lose our birthright? May the flesh receive more emphasis than the spirit? These questions are not irrelevant. They belong to our own immediate day. There is a peril that we may be bewitched into the streets, and lose our place at the great feast. Let me put together half a dozen words, and let me ask you if their order and relationships do not describe a sequence which has been the besetting seduction of every age —forms, ritualism, sacramentarianism, priestism, a Christ with barriers between Himself and His people—the streets! Let us beware of anything which would put a wall between us and the Master of the house. "A certain man made a great supper," and we are entitled to sit down with him at the feast. Let no one confine us to the streets by the imposition of forms, ceremonies, and sacraments. Let us go directly and immediately to Him, and let us "beware of the dogs, and of the evil workers, and of the concision," who would bind us down to an externalism which would rob us of the nourishment of life's eternal feast.

Let us now pass to the other part of my text, in which the apostle turns from a starved and starving externalism to the fruitful inwardness of all true religion. What are the marks of true religion? Paul enumerates three, and they appear to me to be full and all-sufficient. Let us glance at them.

The first characteristic of true religion is worship.—Yes, but what kind of worship? "Worship in the spirit." Not a ceremonial act, not the curbing of the flesh, not the eating of a wafer. These may be the signs and symbols of worship; they do not constitute the worship itself. Worship is in the spirit. It is not the attitude of clasped hands, or reverent prostration of the body; it is the posture of the spirit. "Know ye not that ye are the temple?" That is a great word. Mark it. If I am a temple, a church, the worshipper is within. If this body is a cathedral, what sort of service is going on within? Is the Holy Place dark and silent, or is service proceeding? I know the kind of service which was observed in Paul's temple. We have one or two little glimpses, as through an open doorway, into the nature of his daily services. Here is an instructive view:—"We give thanks without ceasing." That is part of the worship which proceeded in the apostle's temple. Not only at matins or vespers, but ceaselessly! "We give thanks without ceasing." Inside that temple the worshipping spirit told the daily tale of the Lord's mercies, and sent back to the Lord a continuous thanksgiving. That is worship in the Spirit. Here is another glimpse of the apostle's temple service:—"We pray without ceasing." Inside the temple the spirit was always on its knees. Always? Yes; when Paul went from Mars Hill to tent-making his spirit did not alter its posture. It remained upon its knees. When Jesus of Nazareth passed from the temptation to the marriage in Cana of Galilee, His spirit did not change; the service proceeded, the spirit remained upon its knees. That is the very glory of spiritual worship. We can pray without ceasing. We can even now be like the angels; we can "serve Him day and night in His temple." When we pass into our places of business, our soul can retain its reverence, and even in the commonplace we can be possessed by the consciousness of the presence of God. We can hallow all the varied experiences of the common day,—our home, our business, our recreations, our politics, our economics, our æsthetics — we can hallow them all by a spirit that never asserts itself in presumption or vulgarity, but which remains upon its knees, as ever in the presence of the Eternal and Holy God. "Know ye not that ye are the temple?" Have, then, a temple service where prayer proceeds without ceasing. What else went on in the temple of the Apostle Paul? If he were a temple, who was the priest? "He hath made us kings and priests unto God." . . . Then in his own temple Paul was his own priest. Then did the priest offer sacrifices in his temple? Yes, the fire was never out upon the altar. What did he sacrifice? Himself. "I am poured out upon the altar." He offered himself as a ceaseless consecration to his God. These are the temple services of the Apostle Paul. "We give thanks without ceasing." "We pray without ceasing." "I am poured out upon the altar." Thanksgiving! Supplication! Sacrifice! This was the temple service that knew no ending. This is the nature of true religion. This is "worship in the spirit." This is the deep, secret home-life as opposed to the uncertain life of the streets. "Know ye not that ye are the temple?" Let your soul be a ceaseless worshipper. "We worship God in the spirit."

The second characteristic of true religion is exultation. "We glory," we rejoice, we boast! The Jews of the circumcision, the dogs of the street, had their boast and exultation. In what did they glory? They gloried in externals; they revelled in crumbs. They gloried in distinguished lineage and high descent. They gloried in the exclusiveness of their own peculiar caste. They gloried in their aristocracy of culture, and in their isolation from the vulgar herd, whose minds were void of the law and its traditions. They gloried in their own exclusive covenant, and in the sealing bond of circumcision. These were the glories, and in them they found their exultation. These were the boast of externalism, and over against them Paul proclaimed the glory of a true and inward religion. "We glory in Christ

Jesus." In Him we find our crown of rejoicing. In Him we make our boast. Not in forms; not in ordinances; not in privileged exclusiveness; not in remote descent, and in distinguished succession; we glory, directly and immediately, in Christ Jesus our Lord. "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." This is the boast and exultation of true spiritual religion. When anything else is exalted to the throne of glory, the spaciousness of religious life is contracted, and the soul is imprisoned in a carnal bondage. Again I ask, is the danger imaginary, and is the warning gratuitous? I do not know that we hear much glorying in Abrahamic succession, nor is there any attempt to impose that succession as a bondage upon our souls. But I think I have heard men glory in what they call apostolic succession, which at the best is only a ceremonial lineage, and through it the attempt is made to bring all men into carnal bondage. By whom do we obtain access into grace? By the ministry of the last product of apostolic succession? Then in apostolic succession let us glory. But listen to the Apostle Paul;—"by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand." By whom? By Jesus Christ. By faith in Jesus Christ we have access into grace. "I am the door." "By Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved." Then we pay homage to no man-appointed doorkeepers. We glory in no ceremonial succession. We rejoice in the largeness of our spiritual liberty. We glory in the free spaciousness of our home-life in Christ, and we will pray to be delivered from all minor gloryings which may lead us to the precarious externalism of the streets. "We glory in Christ Jesus."

The third mark of true religion is spiritual assurance.—"We have confidence, but not in the flesh." "We have confidence"—that is one of the characteristics for which we must seek in all deep and true religious life. But where shall we gain our confidence? Where must assurance be sought? The apostle answers—"Not in the flesh." Where, then, can our confidence be found? Back in the Christ! "We know that our sins are forgiven us for His name's sake." "We know!" Confidence, but not in the flesh. "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God." "We know!" Confidence, but not in the flesh. "We know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." "We know!" Confidence, but not in the flesh. Our confidence is born out of our fellowship with the Lord. In our spirits we have the witness. "God is a Spirit," and all lasting treasure must be sought in the realm of spirit. "They that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."

IV

WHAT IS WORLDLINESS?

"I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil."—JOHN xvii. 15.

NOT abstraction from the world, but protection from the evil! The deliverance is to be effected, not by the removal of the body, but by the reinforcement of the spirit. Our redemption is to be accomplished, not by changing our locality, but by changing the conditions of the heart. The purpose of our Saviour is to perfect us in holiness, not by withdrawing us from all infections, but by making us proof against all disease in the endowment of invincible health. The ideal of aspiring discipleship is not to be found in innocence, with an environment destitute of temptation, but in holiness, despite the menacing advances of infection and disease. "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer: I have overcome the world." "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil."

Now what is this world, this ever-present worldliness, so perilous, so pervading, surging like an infected atmosphere round about the disciple's life? We shall never apprehend its significance by dwelling merely in the realm of external conduct, and classifying acts in the two categories of white and black, worldly and unworldly, pious and depraved. Worldliness is never to be known from the careful memorising of a catalogue of things to be avoided, and things to be esteemed. Conduct will never be safely and fruitfully guided by mere attention to labels, by whomsoever the labels have been attached. I must know why this act has been labelled worldly, and this other unworldly, and what were the conditions which prevailed when the classification was made. A label may prove grandly effective in checking my steps, in arresting my thought, in sending me to the Court of Appeal to stand before the tribunal of my conscience, in causing me to review my conduct by the illuminating principles of the Christian faith. So far, a ready-made classification may be morally useful. But we are never going to learn the meaning of worldliness by confining our attention to external acts, by doing this and by avoiding that, and guided solely by the labels which have been attached by other hands. I turn to the labellings, and I find that the classification has been prosecuted into most scrupulous minuteness. I do not condemn the classification. I only assert that we cannot wisely and safely begin and end with the enumeration itself. Dialogues are classified as unworldly. Trialogues are getting perilously near the border, and the addition of two or more characters renders the performance theatrical, and most assuredly merits the condemnation of worldly. Draughts are catalogued as unworldly; dominoes are in the region of moral twilight, a kind of uncertain grey; while cards are indisputably placed in the ranks of the worldly. A country-dance is innocent and unworldly; added complications change the category and determine its place among the worldly. My dear old landlord in Edinburgh used to visit his lodgers' sitting-room late on Saturday night, and carefully lock the piano and unlock the harmonium. His classification was determined by his sense of Sabbatic fitness, and to have permitted the piano to speak on the Sabbath would have appeared to him as the opening of the floodgates of a most offensive sacrilege. Well, I have mentioned these things, not to secure their reprobation. To sneer at these devoted souls would be to fling scorn at men whose shoes the majority of us are not worthy to stoop down and unloose. I have mentioned them to support the assertion that we are not going to apprehend and wisely appreciate the genius of worldliness by the study of the mere enumeration of unlawful and permissible acts. Why, the appraisement of the moral contents of an external act changes with the changing times. Our Puritan forefathers regarded the eating of a mince-pie as an act of abject profanity. I suppose that even fifty or sixty years ago it was regarded as a symptom of sheer worldliness and of compromise with the devil for a minister to wear a coloured tie. I am not sure that the judgment is yet altogether obsolete, but certainly it does not enjoy the same widespread prevalence as in the days of old. Classifications vary with the varying days, and it is not in the most scrupulous observance of the most minute classifications that we escape the infection and contagion of the world. It is possible to avoid all the things labelled "worldly," and yet to remain incorrigibly worldly, to be steeped through and through with the spirit of this "present evil world."

What, then, is the world, against which our Master yearns that we should be secured? It is a spirit, a temperament, an attitude of soul. It is life without high callings, life devoid of lofty ideals. It is a gaze always horizontal, never vertical. Its motto is "forward," never "upward." Its goal is success, not holiness. Hearing no mystic voices, it is destitute of reverence. It never bows in rapt and silent wonder in the secret place. It experiences no awe-inspiring perceptions of a mysterious presence. Its life is bounded by the superficies. It stops at the veil, and does not perceive it is a veil, the thin, gauzy covering of the Eternal. It has lusts, but no supplications. It has ambition, but no aspiration. God is not denied; He is forgotten and ignored. Such is the world,—the subtle presence of the non-spiritual, earthliness without heavenliness, life without the conscious possession of an over-arching spiritual firmament, and the forces that call and move in the infinite.

Now see the perilous influence of this upon the disciples of Christ. The presence of the non-spiritual is ubiquitous. It confronts us everywhere. It is mighty, mighty by reason of its visible proportions. Worldly people are in the majority, and their numerical proportions tend to make us timid and afraid. The non-spiritual folk, the folk with the merely horizontal vision, the worldly folk, are so abounding, that the unworldly, the man whose life has sky and aspiration and prayer, stands out in bold and almost curious relief. The oddity of the spiritual has not yet ceased, and he who lives in the heavenly places must be prepared to reveal a life full of glaring eccentricities when contrasted with the life and usages of his day. But that is just what makes us afraid. We shrink from being original. We don't like to appear odd. We are reluctant to be conspicuous by our contrast to non-spiritual men. We should be glad to wear white garments if they were worn by everybody, but to wear them when the prevalent fashion favours quite another colour demands a courage to which we are by no means eagerly inclined. And so, for fear of oddity, we make a compromise. To avoid offence we lower our flag. We check our spirits. We strangle our supplications. We shut out the infinite. We lose the influence of that mystic wind which breathes upon the soul that lives confronting the infinite. This confinement of vision this harsh delimiting of aspiration, effected by a worldly compromise, brings a smothering influence round about the powers of the soul. The soul has hitherto breathed in infinite supplication; now it drowses in cribbed and cabined temporisings. All the coronal faculties begin to lapse into a profound and perilous sleep, and the soul becomes the captive of this present evil world.

Is that a fanciful analysis, remote from the highway of practical life? Let us put the teaching in the shape of a concrete example, which shall be taken from common life. Here is a man who has gone into business as a disciple of Jesus, with lofty hopes and aspirations. He discovers that he has underestimated the might and influence of the ubiquitous and non-spiritual world. He painfully realises the oddity of his position. With others, business speeds; with him, it only crawls. He begins to experience the drawings of an evil gravitation. The emphasis of his life is changed. His eyes are allured to success more than to holiness. Ambition becomes more fervent, and aspiration grows more faint. For him the infinite begins to close, and the closing of the infinite means the corrosion of conscience. "First he called the doings of the place dishonest." The judgment was sharp, immediate, and final. "First he called the doings of the place dishonest; then he called them sharp practice; then he called them a little shady; then he said it was rather close sailing; then he styled it clever; then he laughed at the success of a vile trick; then he touched the pitch, and, thinking all the time it was with one finger, he was presently besmeared all over." A man's experience of men is but small if he cannot confirm the accuracy of this description. It represents an invasion of worldliness, which accomplishes its triumphs by robbing souls of their spirituality, shutting up their heavens, turning their aspirations into lusts, their prayers into carnal ambitions, and confining the total movement of their lives to the horizontal plane of the common earth.

But, now, is it possible for men to be in the world, and to remain undefiled? Jesus of Nazareth did it. "Oh yes, but Jesus was a simple peasant, living among the sweet simplicities of village life, and to the years of manhood experiencing nothing of the blighting and defiling seductions of the more crowded towns and cities." Well, I am not so sure of the accuracy of our common description of village life, of its sweet and undefiled simplicities. No more terrible and appalling concentration of nastiness is to be found anywhere than in many an English village. But be that as it may, Nazareth was not remote from the more voluminous currents of the world. Just near the village was the highroad "along which legions marched, and princes swept with their retinues, and all sorts of travellers from all countries went to and fro. The scandals of the Herods buzzed up and down these roads. The customs too of the neighbouring Gentiles,—their loose living, their sensuous worship, their absorption in business,—all this would furnish endless talk in Nazareth, both among men and boys. Here Jesus grew up and suffered temptation, tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. The perfection of His purity and patience was achieved, not as behind a wide fence, which shut the world out, but amid rumour and scandal, with every provocation to unlawful curiosity and premature ambition." Yes, Jesus remained undefiled in a world abounding in subtle infection and seduction. But not in Syria alone, not only in those few strange and mystic years, has the radiant achievement been wrought. The Christian centuries have been beautified and glorified by Christian disciples, who have walked with Him in white. In their lives have we seen the strong fulfilment of the word of the olden days ;—"Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day, nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. . . . Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder ; the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet." What is the spiritual content of that great promise, but this—that they who "dwell in the secret place of the Most High" shall be proof against all things noisome and noxious and venomous ; they shall step over and through them without being tainted, poisoned, or defiled? "They shall take up serpents," says Christ our Lord—"They shall take up serpents ; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them." They shall be in the world, yet kept from the evil ; mingling with sinners, yet separate from sinners ; and if they are called upon to labour in atmospheres reeking with moral pestilence, "it shall not hurt them."

Yes, purity, even in the defiling ways of the world, is a grand possibility ; how can we make it a glorious achievement ? On one point the New Testament is perfectly clear, and indeed the teaching is enshrined in my text, that the attainment and retainment of unworldliness is not to be found by means ascetic, but by means athletic, not by flight, but by fight, not by indolent retirement, but by the health of a strong, resolute, and aggressive spirit. It was a true inspiration of the artist who depicted a monk at his desk in the monastery cell, with pen in hand, and eyes looking upward for illumination, and the Holy Spirit descending in the form of a dove to bring the light and guidance he sought. That was a true inspiration; but it was equally true to depict a foul spirit speaking from beneath, seeking to engage the monk's attention, that he might whisper in his ear the corrupt and corrupting counsel of the world. In convent and in the busiest highway the two voices call, and no withdrawal of the body will deliver us from the subtle and ensnaring influence of the evil world.

How then is unworldliness to be an actuality, a radiant and ever blessed possession? The only defence against an ill contagion is exuberant health. It is the man who is run down who becomes the victim of the pestilence. It is not otherwise in the realm of the Spirit. If we are to be protected against the pestilence that walketh in darkness, we shall have to be possessed by a plenitude of spiritual life. How is that defensive life to be gained? "*This is life . . . to* *know Jesus.*" To know the Master is to appropriate the Master's life. "I am come that ye might have life, and that ye might have it more abundantly." It is in this abundant life that we find the secret of moral security. If life is to rise within us like a well, it must be because of our intimate fellowship with the Christ. He is "our refuge and strength." Our offensive and defensive forces are to be gathered in Him. Familiarity with Jesus makes a man invincible against the world. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." "We are more than conquerors in Christ."

V

"UNDER HIS WINGS"

"He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust: His truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day, nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday."—PSALMS xci. 4-6.

"THE terror by night!" "The arrow that flieth by day!" "The pestilence that walketh in darkness!" "The destruction that wasteth at noonday!" What an appalling catalogue of foes! They are not peculiar to any one life; they haunt the precincts of all lives. They pervade all the changing hours and moods of the varied day. Every change in the day's march reveals a special and characteristic foe. If life is passing through a season of midnight blackness, it is exposed to the antagonism of the "terror by night." If life has emerged from the blackness, and is passing out into the sweet and broadening light, it becomes endangered by " the arrow that flieth by day." If life is luxuriating under the cloudless, glowing sky of a wealthy noontide, it is imperilled by " the destruction that wasteth at noonday." If the shadows are gathering round again, and the light is fading from the sky, and life experiences the chill of the looming night, it may become the victim of " the pestilence that walketh in darkness." In one or other of these changing seasons we may probably all be found. There is an enemy about us in the noontide, and another in the midnight, and other foes inhabit the twilights of evening and dawn. Let us look a little while at these insidious enemies which beset the child of God.

" *The terror by night.*"—There are many things which become terrific and terrifying through the medium of the night. In the night-time faint sounds become laden with alarming significance. The creaking of the furniture in the room is almost suggestive of the opening of coffins. The stirring of the window by the moving night-air is suggestive of unfriendly approach. The scratching of a mouse at the wainscot becomes fraught with all manner of hostile invasion. As it is with the hearing, so is it with the sight. Vague outlines are filled out into portentous completeness. A bramble-bush represents itself as a crouching foe. A patch of snow in the corner of the field images itself as a sheeted ghost. "Things are not what they seem." In the night we are the victims of exaggeration. The commonplace becomes aggravated. The molehill becomes a mountain. Is not this equally true of the life of the Spirit? How everything rears itself into calamitous proportions when we are "down"! How the petty obstacles become enlarged and multiplied! We see things out of their proportions. We lose the calmness and clearness of our discernment. This is assuredly part of the enemy's forces, who is known as "the terror by night."

"*The arrow that flieth by day.*"—The night is past; the sweet fresh daylight is spread over the life; the terror born of exaggeration is forgotten. Is there no other foe? Enemies may be begotten of sunbeams as well as of darkness. The rays of light may become the arrows of death. How often it happens when men come into the clear happy light of favour, some better part of their being is slain! I wonder how many Sunday School teachers there are in the land with incomes of over £1000 a year! It is a most significant question. How is it that our Sunday Schools are staffed with comparatively poor men and women? You hear it said of one man, "Oh, he has lost interest in that now." Lost? That sounds like something slain. He has been pierced by "the arrow that flieth by day," and some holy sympathy has been destroyed. Or an arrow has transfixed his geniality, his spirit of good-fellowship, and the winsome thing lies dead. He may have been saved from the "terror by night"; he has become the victim of the "arrow that flieth by day."

"*The destruction that wasteth at noonday.*"—This only marks the emphasis of the dangers of the brightening day. It proclaims the perils of the cloudless noon. A frosty night can harden the land, and make it impervious to the ministry of the farmer, but the fierce sunshine can attain the same end. Winter can freeze the land until it is as hard as iron; a succession of June noontides can bake it quite as hard. Adversity can dry up a man's sympathies; prosperity can induce as severe a drought. When a man's life passes into the full blaze of a fierce prosperity, the bloom and beauty of his spirit may be easily wasted and destroyed. His leaf may wither. His reverence may be destroyed. His aspirations may be dried up. Pride may supplant the grace of lowliness, and cocksureness may jostle out the spirit of "a quiet walk with God."

"*The pestilence that walketh in darkness.*"—When the brightness of the afternoon begins to grow dim in the shadows of coming night, and a chill air touches the happy and comfortable spirit, there is great danger of the life becoming possessed by "the pestilence that walketh in darkness." It is not easy to keep a room sweet which is deprived of the sunlight. Fustiness begins to reign where the light is not a guest. We need the help of the Almighty to keep the life sweet when the sunshine is temporarily withdrawn. Everybody knows the ill plagues that stir about us when life comes into the shadows. There is the pestilence of fretfulness, and melancholy, and murmuring, and despair. The heart is sorely prone to open its gates to these types of pestilence when it first encounters the chilly shadows of an unexpected night.

Now let us turn away from the foes, and contemplate our resources. We have looked at the enemies ; now let us look at our all-sufficient Friend.

"*He shall cover thee with His feathers.*"—Against all possible types of enemies we may enjoy the protection of the great Mother-Bird, God. "He shall *cover* thee." The protection is to be perfectly complete. The wings would enfold us so that there is no possible opening for the dangerous approach of a foe. What may we not hope to gain in such a gracious refuge? We may expect to find *healing*. "The Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings." If we have been wounded by the arrow, or affrighted by the terrors of the night, we shall be healed and comforted under the shadow of the Almighty. The troubled, frightened child, who has been startled in the darkness of the night, is hugged to its mother's breast, and speedily the panting, agitated little heart is comforted into rest again. And if we have been seeing things, and hearing things, out of their true shapes and proportions, the comforting breast of our God will restore us to quietness again. "Let not your heart be troubled." Let it not be agitated and alarmed. "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest." And if we may gain healing, we shall also surely gain *security*. In an old Puritan writer I have found the phrase, "Under His wings we have curing and securing." The quaint expression serves my purpose to-night. Under the wings of the

Almighty our wounds are healed, and our alarms are stilled, and a joyful confidence pervades the soul. We may be in the night, but no terror will disturb us. We may be in the broadening light, but no arrow will wound us. We may be in the noontide, but no glare will consume us. We may be in the shadows, but no pestilence will corrupt us. "Under His wings will I take refuge."

"*His truth shall be thy shield and buckler.*"—The Psalmist is employing a variety of figures that he may make clear to us the amplitude of the protecting grace of God. He is not contented with the wealthy figure of the Mother-Bird; he adds another—"Thy shield." And then, as if both figures were not sufficiently emphatic and effective, he adds a third—"Thy buckler." The shield may appear to be only a partial defence, but the buckler is an all-surrounding coat of mail, covering the person on every side. There is no part left exposed to the enemy's attack. Before and behind, on the right hand and on the left, I am beset by the protective power of God. To what does the Psalmist attribute this mighty defence? "His truth." "His truth shall be thy Shield and Buckler." Perhaps we may express the pith of the Psalmist's meaning by using in place of the word "truth" the more personal word "truthfulness," or "trustworthiness." Mark, then, this: it is not our feelings which are to be our defence. Our feelings may be as changeable as a barometer, and building upon them we have no fixed, dependable resource. If I am to judge the defences of my religious life by the state and quality of my feelings, then I can clearly see that there are breaches in the wall every day, through which the evil one may make his attack. I turn from my feelings to the truthfulness of God. At once I pass from loose stones to compact rock. His truthfulness, the sure word of His promise, is to be my strong defence. "Hath He not said, and shall He not do it?" What hath He said about thy past? "Shall He not do it?" What hath He said about thy present? "Shall He not do it?" What hath He said concerning thy to-morrow? "Shall He not do it?" "His truth shall be thy shield and buckler."

"*Thou shalt not be afraid.*"—Hiding beneath His wings, and depending upon the sure word of His promise, "thou shalt not be afraid." Thy life shall be possessed by a fruitful quietness. Thou shalt reap "the harvest of a quiet eye." Every changing mood of the varied day shall bring thee good and not ill. The night-time shall bring its treasure. The morning shall be the minister of gracious dews. The noonday shall deposit its glory, "and at evening time it shall be light."

VI

THE POWER OF THE CROSS

"For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God."—1 COR. i. 22.

"*THE Jews ask for signs,*" a request which is not necessarily indicative of a thirst; it may be an asking behind which there is no parched and aching spirit. That is the bane and peril of all externalism. It may gratify a feverish curiosity without awakening the energies of a holy life. The Jews asked for signs. "Now, when Herod saw Jesus he was exceedingly glad," for he hoped to see a sign. It was a restless curiosity, itching for the sensation of some novel entertainment; it was not the pang of a faint and weary heart hungering for bread. "He answered him nothing." "The Jews ask for signs," a request which is frequently indicative of a life of moral alienation.

Externalism abounds in moral opiates, and in externalisms men often discover drugs by which they benumb the painful sense of their own excesses. “A wicked and an adulterous generation seeketh after a sign.” Men try to resolve into merely physical sensations and sensationalisms what can only be apprehended by the delicate, tender tendrils of a penitent and aspiring soul.

“*And the Greeks seek after wisdom.*”—They are the epicures in philosophies, the dainty tasters of intellectual subtleties; they are the experts who relish speculative cleverness, whose mouths water at the airiest abstractions, and who recoil from the severely practical in stern disgust and contempt. “The Jews ask for signs,” and their religion degenerates into a despiritualised system of magic. “The Greeks seek after wisdom,” and their religion becomes the domain of the disciplinist theorist, the heritage of a cultured and exclusive aristocracy. “But we preach Christ crucified,” proclaiming what appears to be His shame, glorying in what appears to be the hour of His collapse, emphasising the season of His appalling darkness, obtruding the bloody, unadorned, and undecked Cross on which He suffered His apparent defeat. “We preach Christ crucified”—we do not whisper it; “we preach

Christ crucified"—we do not whisper it in secret coteries; we do not timidly submit it for subdued discussion in the academic grove; we do not offer it to the hands of exclusive circles—we preach it, we stand out like the town-crier in the public way, and we proclaim it to the common and indiscriminate crowd. "The Jews ask for signs; we preach Christ crucified, *unto the Jews a stumbling-block.*" They cannot get over it; it obtrudes itself like a barrier right athwart the common track of their common thought; it throws all their reckonings into confusion; it confronts their hunger for a novel entertainment by an apparent stone. Christ crucified! A sign! It is significant of nothing but shame, failure, utter and dishonourable defeat. "The Greeks seek after wisdom; we preach Christ crucified, *unto the Greeks foolishness.*" It offended their mental pride, it confronted their speculative ingenuity as a piece of unmitigated absurdity, and they repelled it, repelled it because it did not approach and conciliate their interest in the graceful robes of an alluring philosophy. To the Jews a stumbling-block, to the Greeks an absurdity; but "*to them that are called,*" to them who offer it the hospitality of mind and heart, to them who reverently entertain it on the plea of its own august claims, to them who render it the willing homage and obedience of the will, "to them that are called, *both Jews and Greeks*," irrespective of nationality or race, "*Christ, the power of God*," a mighty dynamic which is the pledge of all moral, spiritual triumph, "*and the wisdom of God*," an illumination in which the reverent soul is led into the secret hallowed precincts of the very Light of Life.

"We preach Christ crucified," says Paul, and we are not going to be diverted by the hunger for mere sensation; "we preach Christ crucified," and we are not going to be disengaged from our high calling, and tempted to submit our Gospel as a piece of subtle and mincing controversy. We preach it boldly, definitely—"Christ, and Him crucified." It was the only message for the apostolic day; it is the only Gospel for our own.

1. I want to lead your thoughts round about this great text, and to ask you to consider with me why it is that the Gospel of Christ and Him crucified is the only redeeming message for our own day. *We preach Christ crucified, because it is the doctrine which incomparably preserves for us the sense of the Holiness of God.* Now, is that altogether an irrelevant and particularly inopportune word to apply to our own day? I think that the sense of the holiness of God is an element

that is conspicuously lacking in our modern religious life. One misses it in our prayers; it is by no means pronounced in our latest hymns; its presence is not indicated by any pronounced signs in our life. Our ears do not seem to be as open to the cry of the seraphim, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts." I turn to the Old Testament, and I find men lying prostrate in the dust, while they cry in most fruitful wonder, "Holy, holy, holy." I turn to the Apocalypse, to those mystic glimpses of life in the unseen; and wherever I turn, my eyes are smitten with the oft-repeated cry, "Holy, holy, holy." "They have no rest," says John,—"They have no rest day nor night, saying, Holy, holy, holy." I take up great works of devotion, great manuals and helpmeets of devotion, and I find that every devotional exercise is prefaced by an attempt to realise the awful holiness of God. Take down from your shelves Lancelot Andrewes' great Book of Private Devotion, a book to which I personally and privately owe much more than I can ever tell you—take down Lancelot Andrewes' Book of Private Devotion. How does each day's exercise begin? In what he calls meditation and adoration. Why, the very words have an old-world flavour about them as though they belonged to a long past and obsolete day. Meditation, adoration! And Lancelot Andrewes leads us in this meditation and adoration right up to the great White Throne, into the awful stillness of the holy place, and instinctively you feel you must take the shoes from off your feet, that you must silence every loud trampling frivolity and flippancy, that the very stillness may steep its message into your awakened and wondering spirit. And then Lancelot Andrewes leads from adoration and meditation to confession, and I do not wonder that such meditations are followed by such confessions, and such contemplations by such agonising cries, such visions by such tears. But, brethren, that is a very silent note in our day. This never-silent emphasis in Scripture, and this essential preface to all great books of devotion, are not to be found in very pronounced emphasis in our modern religious life. I do not think that the cry rings through our ears to-day as it did through the ears of the saints of old—"Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty." The God whom we commonly conceive is lax, loose, kindly, easy-going, and good-natured; a God with whom we dare to trifle, a God with whom we dare to take liberties without being afraid of the consuming flame—an easy-going God. Why should I fear? God is love. Why should I take the shoes from off my feet? And so, my brethren, there are a number of words that have become almost obsolete; they are quite dropping out of our religious vocabulary—awe, fear, trembling, and reverence. I do not think we particularly like hymns of this kind to-day:

Lo! God is here, let us adore,
And own how dreadful is this place.

We may not like the words, we may be very happy that they have become obsolete, but the great realities which the words portray will have to be restored to our religious thought. The conception of the holiness of God must not be relegated to primitive times as though it belonged to the merely immature thinkings of the old dispensation: it is an equally cardinal revelation of the new. The idea of Fatherhood does not exclude or obscure the idea of holiness; it includes and intensifies it. Our Master Himself, in a word which I think is far more pregnant than we are inclined to suppose—our Master Himself took the two words, and sought, for our infinite advantage, to reveal their eternal wedlock when he cried "Holy Father." It is the first of the two words I want to have re-enthroned—"Holy Father." If I want to gaze upon the holiness of God I know no place like the Cross; nowhere else do I see—speaking now not as a preacher, speaking now as a disciple—nowhere else do I see, as I see at the Cross, the wondrous purity of the great White Throne; nowhere do I more find such fruitful stillness as when I am near the Cross; nowhere do I feel so inclined to take the shoes from off my feet. And how do you account for it? I stood in a Roman Catholic chapel a day or two ago, in the Oratory in Birmingham, where Cardinal Newman finished his days; and I stood just under the figure of the crucified Christ. I do not know that it helped me better to realise my Master's love for me, but I noticed that the steps which formed the pediment were worn with the knees of praying folk. I wonder how it is we are so still when we get near the Cross! May it not be because we are instinctively sensitive that we are very near the great White Throne,—and that there, in the supreme revelation of sacrifice, we have a supreme revelation of the Eternal holiness? My brethren, I plead that we may get that note back into our religious life. We are never going to have grand trees of righteousness until they are rooted in a rich soil of reverence, and we are never, I think, going to get the requisite reverence until we find time to contemplate God's holiness; and I do not know any place that will lead us to such a fruitful contemplation of God's holiness as when we take our place near the Cross. "We preach Christ crucified," because the preaching of the doctrine helps us create and preserve a sense of the Holiness of our God.

2. *We preach Christ crucified, because it is the doctrine which incomparably creates and preserves the sense of the nature of Sin.*—Any doctrine which unveils the holiness of God reveals also the horribleness of sin; any doctrine which obscures God's holiness veneers man's sin. If God were merely the easy-going, good-natured, lax, and kindly Deity of many modern worshippers, sin would remain for ever essentially unrevealed. God the lax, the kindly, good-natured, easy-going, would just bend over His rebellious children and say, "My children, I forgive you." Well, my brethren, that might make us easy; it would never make us good. Forgiveness is counterfeit which decorates the sin it forgives. Such forgiveness only paves the way for a repetition of the offence. All true forgiveness throws a most lurid illumination on the sin that is forgiven. That is true in purely human relations. A father's forgiveness is criminal if it benumbs the consciousness

of the crime. If, when I forgive my child, my forgiveness diminishes his sense of sin, then I become a participant in the sin I forgive. That is the thoughtless, easy-going, good-natured goodness of the world to which our Master solemnly refers when He says, "If any man love child more than Me, he cannot be My disciple." If any man love his child in such a way as to make his child more Christless, if he love his child in such a way as to gloss over his young one's sin, then I say his very tenderness and his very forgiveness will appear hateful in the sight of God, for his tenderness and his forgiveness have made sin appear to be less hateful and less revolting, and he can have none of the spirit of the Master and be none of His. In the light of all true forgiveness sin is revealed to be as black as the nether hell. Where, then, shall I see the horrors of sin? Where forgiveness is most truly revealed. Where shall I see sin most keenly? Where forgiveness is supremely revealed. In the place of forgiveness I shall see the unutterable horrors of sin. Well, then, I turn to the Sermon on the Mount. I find no awakening there. I find great principles, lofty ideals, severe standards, great moral maxims. I bask in the soft sunny inspiration of great encouragements; I tremble amid the lightning flashes of appalling warnings; my incompletenesses yawn before me; all my defects are ragged and jagged in the burning noon, but I do not feel ashamed of the pain and the horribleness and the fearfulness of sin. It is not otherwise when I turn even to the story of the Prodigal Son. I may be melted into tears, and yet my tears may not help my vision. Many a man has been made homesick by the story of the Prodigal who has nevertheless not been made sick of his sin. What I want is something that will not merely make me homesick, but something that will reveal to me the hatefulness of sin, the leprous disgustingness of sin, that I may not only turn away home, but recoil from sin in contempt as a healthy man turns from diseased and disgusting food. That is what I want. And I do not see or fear *my sin* in the Sermon on the Mount. Nor do I fear and find it in the story of the Prodigal Son. But when I stand at the Cross; when I lift my eyes to the crucified Son of God; when I recall the word that He spoke, " God so loved the world that He gave His Son,"—in the love that blazes in that death I can see something of the sin for which He died. I see it, as I see it nowhere else. When I stand at the Cross I am permitted in my measure to see sin through the eyes of my God.

The Cross is the place of great awakening for sinners. And explain it as we may, or leave it unexplained, the experience of the Christian Church has gathered abundant witness to the truth of this statement. It is in the place where forgiveness is most supremely revealed that men have gained the most searching convictions of their sin. It has been always at the preaching of the Cross that men have been pricked—we have not a better word yet—that men have been pricked in their heart. Just look at the old apostolic word. They were, says the Acts of the Apostles, "pricked in their heart," pricked, goaded, irritated; first made irritable, and filled with unrest, until it touched the heart and became a pain and an agony. Nowhere else, nohow else, can you get the pain and the shame and the fear of sin which you find awakened at the Cross. And if we men and women of this latter day wish to gaze into the awfulness of Sin, we shall have to take our stand at the mystic confluence of midnight and noonday and abide in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. "In Thy light shall we see light," and part of the illumination will be the veritable horror of Sin.

3. *We preach Christ crucified, because it is a doctrine in the experience of which we incomparably*

discern the realities of Grace.—The Cross is not merely ~~the birthplace of my~~ fears, or the birthplace of my shames, or the birthplace of my disgusts ; it is the birthplace of the radiant and immortal hope. I like old John Nelson's words when he was preaching about the influence of John Wesley's preaching and its effect upon him. When he had done, he said, "This man can tell the secrets of my heart, but he hath not left me there, he hath showed me the remedy, even the blood of Christ. Then was my soul filled with consolation, through hope that God, for Christ's sake, would save me." But that has not been merely the experience of John Nelson : it has been the experience wherever Christ, and Him crucified, has been proclaimed. Where has the sanctified comfort of the Christian Church been found ? Not far away from the Cross ! "And I saw in my dream that just as Christian came up to the Cross his burden loosed from off his shoulders and fell from off his back, and began to tumble, and so continued to do until it came to the mouth of the sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more. Then was Christian glad and lightsome, and said with a moving heart, 'He has given me rest by His sorrow and life by His death!'" But I will turn away from John Bunyan, who might be thought to be a very partial witness to the power of his Lord, and I will turn to a little frequented path, to Goethe, perhaps to Goethe's masterpiece. Let me give you just a short extract from those wonderful words in the *Confessions of a Beautiful Soul*:—

"I leaned on a little table beside me and I hid my tear-stained face in my hands, and who could ever express even in the dimmest way the experience that came to me then? A secret influence drew my soul to the Cross where Jesus once expired. It was an inward leaning—I cannot give it any other name—an inward leaning like that which draws the heart to its beloved in its absence. As my soul drew near to Him who became mine and died upon the Cross, in that moment I knew what Faith meant, and in that moment my spirit received a wholly new power of uplifting." Worthy perhaps to stand side by side with the testimony of John Bunyan!

But one need not go to literature for one's instances to prove that it is just at the Cross men lose their burden and find the truth of the realities of grace. A very dear and intimate friend of mine only this last week related to me a dream which had been blessed by God to the redemption of his own father. The father dreamed that he was a hare, and a hare he was. So real and so graphic was the consciousness of the dream, that he felt he could almost smell the dewy turnip-tops of the fields amongst which he moved. Suddenly he heard the cry of the hounds. He pricked his ears, listened, and bolted full pace across the fields. The hounds drew nearer and nearer, and came at last so close to him that he could feel their hot breath. Then he found that he was leaving the green pastures and was reaching bare and rugged heights; and just when he had reached those bare and rocky heights he became conscious that his pursuers were not hounds. They were his sins, and he was a flying soul! Away up, away up, away up towards the summit he saw a cave, and terrified beyond measure he made for the cave and then turned round. The entrance to the cave was flooded with a most unearthly light, and just in the centre of the opening there shone resplendently a cross, standing between him and the awful things that pursued. He awoke, and behold, it was a dream. But by the power of the dream he was redeemed.

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.

4. *We preach Christ crucified, because it is the doctrine in whose heart we find ample resources for*

the attainment of moral and spiritual health.—It is not merely a kindly friend who comes and gives me the gratification of a pleasant and fleeting sentiment. The doctrine of Christ, and Him crucified, is generative of moral and spiritual force. It is the doctrine above all others, so far as my experience in the ministry can tell, which is productive of the ethical energy required for the arduous living of our daily life. It is the power of God unto salvation. I think I can almost feel the thrill of the apostle's heart when he said it—The Gospel of God is "the power of God *unto* salvation," right up to it, not merely to regeneration, but to sanctification and perfect health. It is the power of God until God Himself shall put His hand upon me and say, Saved! It is the dynamical power of God, enabling me to meet my daily foes, to front them in confidence, to overcome them, not faintingly, but to be more than a conqueror, to march over them as a man in Christ my God.

So I say that for ethical revivals we must first of all have evangelical revivals. We must first of all have the doctrine of the Cross before we can hope for moral elevation. I wonder how many of my audience have read David Brainerd's *Journal of his Life and Doings amongst the North American Indians?* If my young brethren in the ministry would take a word from me they would buy that book, and have it by the bedside. Next to John Wesley's *Journal* it is the book in which I find most devotional help. Get David Brainerd's *Life and Journal*, edited by Jonathan Edwards, and turn to the end of that *Journal*, where you will find an essay by David Brainerd on the doctrine he preached among the Indians, where he makes a statement which is full of heartening to myself in my own ministry. He says, " I never got away from Jesus, and Him crucified, and I found that when my people were gripped by this great evangelical doctrine of Christ, and Him crucified, I had no need to give them instructions about morality. I found that one followed as the sure and inevitable fruit of the other." That is a wonderful word to come from a saintly man like David Brainerd, who hated sin as he feared hell! He said, " I find my Indians begin to put on the garments of holiness, and their common life begins to be sanctified even in a trifle when they are possessed by the doctrine of Christ, and Him crucified." When I look round among my people, and look round in my nation, and long for an ethical revival for the reformation of outward manners and life, I know that the power in which it is to be accomplished is the preaching of Christ, and Him crucified. Christ, and Him crucified, is the doctrine which is to be creative of the moral reformation of our country.

And, lastly, how is a great Gospel like this to be preached? If it is the doctrine in which I best discern the Holiness of God, if it is the doctrine in which I discover the horribleness of Sin, if it is the doctrine which reveals to me the realities of Grace, if it is the doctrine in which I find the resources of Ethical Revival—How shall I preach it? There is only one way. A Gospel of infinite compassion must be preached in the spirit of compassion in which it was born. My brethren in the ministry, we need to pray, and to pray long and to pray fervently, that we may never become hard. I think if there is one thing we need more than another it is the grace of compassion. We want to have a spirit of compassion until we almost instinctively perceive the poignant need of those to whom we seek to minister. I have gone more than once in my ministry in Newcastle and got as near as I could to the place on which John Wesley stood when he preached his first sermon among the Northumbrians. I daresay you remember that part of his *Journal* where he says that he thinks he had never noticed such wickedness as he encountered in Newcastle-on-Tyne, such blasphemy, such cursing, such swearing even from the mouths of little children. I always read the *Journal* there with great and tender interest, because I wondered how John Wesley would think and feel in face of such a horrible state of things. You know he just adds in his *Journal*, " Surely this place is ripe for the Master." I do not think you will be surprised to learn that preaching to those undone and diseased folk of Northumbria he took one of the tenderest texts he could find, and preached on " He was wounded for our transgressions ; He was bruised for our iniquities." And then he tells us in the very next paragraph that when he had done, the people just clung to his clothes and to his hands. He had brought them to the Master and to the Cross. It is the same power to-day. Our God is willing to be powerful, willing to manifest an energy which shall compel men to stand, to wonder, and to pray, not only here but in all lands. It is the power of God unto salvation. If we are to retain, or even to gain, this spirit of compassion, we ourselves must live very near the Cross ; and abiding by the Cross, it is possible for us to be bathed in the compassions that fail not ; and with the message upon our lips of Christ, and Him crucified, we shall gather many souls unto God.

VII

REST FOR WEARY FEET

"I will give you rest."—MATTHEW xi. 28.

ONE of the youngest of our poets, and in many ways perhaps the most brilliant of them, Mr. William Watson, has given us some beautiful verses which were born in his soul as he stood by Wordsworth's grave. He asks himself what it is in Wordsworth which makes him the sought companion of multitudes, and which has given the poet a place among the immortals. He compares him with many others of our poets, and finds that the excellent glories in which they shone he conspicuously lacks. He has none of "Milton's keen translucent music," none of "Shakespeare's cloudless, boundless human view." He has none of "Byron's tempest anger, tempest mirth." He lacks "the wizard twilight Coleridge knew," and "Shelley's flush of rose on peaks divine." In all these great poetic treasures, which his peers possess, Wordsworth is wanting. What endowment then had he, of his own, which could make amends for all this lack? Our poet answers, "He had, for weary feet, the gift of rest." That is Wordsworth's wealth—"for weary feet, the gift of rest." His poetry takes the heart, and just bathes and steeps it in an atmosphere of deep quietness and peace. He takes us away from the strife of tongues, and from the hard and jarring noise of city life, away to that quiet land of lakes, on to those still uplands, whose only sounds are the cry of the peewit and the bleating of a wandering sheep. And as you read the poetry, and feed upon its spirit, the stillness of the moorland and the mountain tarn enters in and pervades your soul, and you enjoy a sense of most refreshing peace. He has "for weary feet, the gift of rest."

Ay, but put down your Wordsworth, and you are back again in the old city. You awake to the hard reality and noise of things, and the still atmosphere of the poem has gone like the fabric of a dream. The old world is as clamorous as ever. Its ways are as rough and stony as ever. Its rude and thoughtless jostlings are as painful and as breathless as ever. Your feet are soon again weary, and your heart is tired and sore. The poet's gift of rest is beautiful and not to be despised. It provides a short holiday for the soul, but only a holiday, a temporary respite, from which it must return to the old monotonous beaten ways, and soon find itself wearied with the old strife, the old care, the old sin. But the soul craves, not merely for a holiday, a temporary tent-life on some poetic hill, but for "a rest that remaineth"—to use the apostolic word—"a rest that remaineth," remaineth even when we are in the midst of strife and trouble and death. That is the rest for which the weary heart craves, and which no poet has it in his power to give. His gift of rest is a holiday; we want the rest of the Eternal, the changeless rest.

But there is Another who claims to have for weary feet the gift ot rest. The world is always full of weary feet, and the days of the Nazarene were no exception. The souls that gathered about Him numbered a great many weary ones, tired, self-nauseated, faint. He looked upon them, and saw their weariness, and was moved with infinite pity, and thus appealed to them: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "I will give." How? You remember that other great word He spake on another day: "Not as the world giveth, give I." How does the world give? If the world wished to help a heavy-laden man, it would seek to do it by removing his burden. The world's way of giving rest is by removing a man's yoke. "Not as the world giveth, give I." The world would create a paradise of sluggards. The world's heaven would be a life without burdens. Its gift of rest would be a gift of ease. "Not as the world giveth, give I." That is not His way. The restful life is not the easeful life—life without burdens or yokes. The gift of Jesus is a gift of rest while wearing the yoke, rest while carrying the cross, rest in the very midst of mystery temptation, and strife. "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Now, let us look at one or two types of weary feet to which this Saviour will, with infinite gladness, bring the gift of rest. Look around you. Where would you look to find the most weary feet in the city? Where would you find the soul most tired and wearied? You would not necessarily find it in homes that had been the scenes of great and burdensome sorrow. The deepest weariness is not the accompaniment of the deepest grief. Through the darkest sorrows the soul can often "walk and not faint." So that I don't think I should seek out the homes of blackest sorrow if I wished to find the most weary life. Where then should we find it? Look at those twelve disciples who were chosen by our Lord. Which of them would you think experienced the deepest weariness of spirit? Would you single out Thomas, and say that his very proneness to doubt must have often filled him with deep weariness, as he encountered so much that was mysterious and perplexing? Or would you point out John, and say that his clear vision of the ideal life, with all its love and light and truth, must have created a deep sense of weariness as he compared the ideal with the real, and saw how unfriendly the world was to the pure and the true? Or would you pick out Peter, and say that a man who was always resolving and always failing must have often sunk into a profound weariness, and felt as though it were useless for his tired and beaten soul to strive any more? I think that each of these disciples must have known at times a really deep weariness of spirit, and yet I would have chosen none of these if I wanted to select the man who experienced the most terrible weariness of all. I should have put my hand upon Judas Iscariot. I should say that he knew seasons of weariness of which the Apostle John could not conceive. And why? Because he was a selfish man, the most selfish heart in the disciple band. There is no weariness like the weariness which gathers round about a selfish heart, and if we could place our finger upon the most selfish heart in the city, we should have discovered a life that moves with terribly weary feet. Why, such a character is a commonplace in fiction because it is a commonplace in life. Think of any selfish character in fiction whom you can call to mind, and you will find that he moves through discontentments and dissatisfactions and continued unrest. A man who lives entirely for himself becomes at last obnoxious to himself. I believe it is the very law of God that self-centredness ends in self-nauseousness. There is no weariness like the weariness of a man who is wearied of himself, and that is the awful Nemesis which follows the selfish life. I am inclined to believe that a great deal of the tiredness and weariness of the world, perhaps more than we commonly think, is only the sickly loathing and self-disgust arising from a morbid selfishness, however much we may strive to attribute it to something else. Be that as it may, there is one truth which may be proclaimed with absolute dogmatism, that selfishness inevitably tends to create self-nausea and weary feet.

Well, you know what remedy we commonly

prescribe for such complaints. What do we say of the selfish man who is weary, discontented, full of jadedness and unrest? What do his fellows say of him? They say: " He wants to get away from himself." It is a very suggestive phrase. A man getting away from *himself!* For why? For *rest!* If he could only get away from himself, he would lose that sense of weariness and nausea, and find a pleasing rest. It is only another way of expressing the truth, which is so beautifully worded in one of the hymns we sing, where we pray for "a heart at leisure from itself." "A heart at leisure from itself!"—a heart that gets away from itself, that does not stay brooding over itself, fondling itself, nursing itself, until it loathes itself in weariness—a "heart at leisure from itself," and by its absence from itself finding strength and rest.

Now, listen to the Master: "Come unto Me, ye weary, selfish ones, and I will give you rest." And how will He do it? By taking us away from ourselves, by giving us leisure from ourselves, by making us unselfish. When a weary, selfish heart comes to the Saviour, the Saviour meets his need by saying, "Take My yoke upon you." "But, Lord, he is tired and weary already; another yoke will crush him." No, no; he has just been carrying himself, and himself only, and that is the heaviest of all loads, heavier than any man can bear. But strange it is, that if he adds another burden, his own burden will become light. That is the mystery of grace, that the burdens of a selfish man are lightened by adding more. "Take My yoke upon you." And what yoke is that, Lord? "The yoke of other people's needs—the burdens of the blind and the deaf, and the lame and the lepers—the burdens of other folk's sorrows—put them on to thy shoulders—take My yoke upon thee—increase thy burden, and thy burden shall become light, and instead of weariness thou shalt find rest." Now, it may be that there are weary hearts among my hearers whose weariness is only the measure of their selfishness, and for them this old world is true. Jesus will give you rest by giving you His yoke; He will add to your burden, and so make your burden light. He will enlarge your thought to take in others, and so give you leisure from yourselves. He will take away your jadedness, and give you His own rest. You "shall run and not be weary," you shall "walk and not faint."

But selfishness, while it accounts for much, does not explain all the weariness of the world. The weariness of selfishness can be expelled by unselfish Christian service. But the unselfish have often weary feet, and crave the gift of rest. Can this Saviour meet the need? Let us look around us. What kind of weary lives do we see? There are the anxious ones. The Master could see many of them in the crowd to whom He was speaking—anxious ones, living in fear of the unknown, not able to rest upon to-day, however bright and fair it be, because to-day so speedily changes into to-morrow, and to-morrow is all unknown. It is this great surrounding unknown which creates our anxiety and feeds it into strength. That dark unknown is the parent of our fears. Well, this anxiety, this continued tension of spirit, produces great spiritual exhaustion, The anxious soul moves with weary feet, and would fain meet with one who had the gift of rest. I say our Master saw these anxious ones among His hearers, and to them He cried, "Come unto me, ye heavy-laden ones, and I will give you rest." How does He give it? I want you to notice the verses which immediately precede the words that I have quoted. I am afraid we sometimes ignore them because of the magnificence of the promise that follows. But they seem to me to have a very close and vital connection with the promise itself. The Master saw how many souls there were who were troubled and anxious about the unknown. And *He* knew the great secret which, if accepted, would set all their hearts at rest. What did He know? He knew God! If everybody knew God, nobody would be anxious. He knew Him, and would unveil Him! "No man knoweth the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him." "Come unto Me, ye anxious, laden ones, and I will give you rest. To you shall that dark unknown be filled with the Father's face, and your anxiety shall be changed into assurance and peace."

Have I succeeded in making the connection between these verses plain? The Saviour seems to say, "If they only knew their Father, their anxiety would vanish like cloud-spots in the dawn. I know the Father—I will make Him known to them! Come unto Me, ye anxious ones, and by a wondrous revelation I will give you rest." And so He seeks to turn weariness into rest by the unveiling of the Father. And in what strangely beautiful ways He made the Father known! He told them that to Providence there were no trifles, that God did not merely control great things, and allow smaller things to go by chance. "The very hairs of your head are all numbered." Nothing is overlooked; all is full of thought and purpose. "Look at that sparrow," He said; "how very lightly you regard it: a cheap thing: two of them sold for a farthing: and yet your Father *knows* when a sparrow falls! Be not anxious! God is thinking about all things! If the world were moving irrationally, without controlling thought, then anxiety would be natural and pardonable. But all things are happening in the thought of God, and God is Love." That was the revelation the Saviour made; and will any one say that if accepted, it would not end the anxiety of the world, and turn its mind-weariness into rest? To come to Jesus is to take His revelation of the Father, and to live in the inspiration of it, and such inspiration would turn fear into confidence, and confidence into peace. Think of it. Suppose that the sky of our souls, instead of being an "unknown" which might prove treacherous, were a Father's face, gracious and beneficent: and suppose that we lived in "the light of that countenance," and never lost sight of it for a day, don't you think that that would create within us confidence out of which would spring eternal rest? The Apostle Paul accepted the revelation of Jesus, and lived in it and through it, and when dark days came, he quietly sang, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able." That was just what the Master said, "If only they knew Him, their anxiety would change into an untroubled peace." And here is Paul, confirming the Master's word: "I *know* whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able," and in the days of darkness and persecution he remained steadfast and unmovable, enjoying the very rest of God. "Come unto Me, all ye weary, anxious ones, and I will reveal to you your Father, and in the beauty of the revelation ye shall discover the gift of rest."

VIII

STARTLING ABSENCES

"He shall not strive, nor cry, neither shall any man hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench."—MATTHEW xii. 19.

"NOT strive," not "cry," not lift up His voice "in the streets," not break "the bruised reed," not quench "the smoking flax"! These are some of the rarest and finest features of a character that is altogether lovely. They are negative characteristics. Certain things are suppressed, and the suppression reveals a consummate moral and spiritual beauty. The character of the Christ is no less unique in its striking absences than in its majestic presences. Its valleys are as conspicuous as its mountains. Its most imposing manifestations are to be found in its restraints. Its most luminous revelations are ofttimes the children of silence. The Holy Ghost works in the way of a certain exclusion. His handiwork is differentiated from all others by its incomparable restraints. No strife, no crying, no lifting up of the voice in the streets, no hastiness! In the Spirit-filled life "the things which are not" are as marvellous and powerful as "the things which are." The very absences are forces which startle the dull, lethargic world, and awake it to the discernment of a glory as beautiful as it is strange. My brethren, we have to work through these striking absences. The world that lieth in wickedness oft appears to be very uninterested both in us and in our message. Perhaps we are too much like the world we are seeking to redeem to be able to wake the world to any wonder. The world must look at the professed Christian, and behold the absence of itself! There are certain things which must not be, and their absence must surprise the world into a great and eager inquisitiveness. We must not strive, nor cry, nor lift up our voice in the streets; we must not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. These tendencies must be suppressed, and their suppression must be the work of the Holy Ghost.

Now mark the first of the suppressions in the life that is filled with the Holy Ghost. "He shall not strive." He will erect no altar to the goddess of discord. The treasure of the soul shall not be dribbled away in incessant squabble. The mind shall not waste its strength in petty and purposeless dispute. Life shall not be passed in an idle controversy. "He shall not strive." The spirit of wrangling shall be absent. He shall have a controversy with sin. He shall oppose the truth to all the lofty confrontings of error. Falsehood he shall withstand to the face. But he shall not wrangle. He may differ with many men: he shall strive or wrangle with none.

For what is wrangling? Wrangling is the spirit which subordinates the triumph of truth to the triumph of self. When a man begins to wrangle, his sight has become self-centred; he has lost the vision of truth. He is seeking the throne for himself, and not for his God. He is fighting for a personal supremacy, and to gain it he will betray the very truth under whose banner he professes to serve. Wrangling creates an earth-born cloud which shuts out the heights and the depths and the breadths, obscuring the distant horizon and the lofty heaven, and leaving the soul no object of contemplation but its own impoverished self. When God ceases to be the goal of mental combatants, high controversy soon degenerates into small dispute. You never find the wrangling spirit in the main highways of the truth. You find him in some byway, some blind alley, some side issue, dwelling in petty inferences, nursing his own vanity, far away from the broad, moving, regnant life of redemptive truth. Wrangling always nourishes itself on side issues. It feeds upon trifles. The littleness of the controversy directly ministers to the vanity of the controversialist. He can grasp the problem. He can walk all round it. There is no side of darkening mystery which calls for the removal of the shoes and an approach of breathless reverence and awe. He calls it "only a little point," but he clings to it, and wrangles about it, that he may taste the sweets of a personal triumph. The wrangling in our Churches is never found in the "highway of the Lord." Over that highway, we are told, the unclean shall never pass, and the spirit of wrangling is essentially unclean. No, the wrangling in the Churches gathers round about a trifle, not about the white robes, the garments of salvation, but about the cut of an ecclesiastical vesture; not about the salvation of the world, but about the comparative claims of the home and the foreign field. I don't see how it is possible for men to wrangle about the deepest mysteries and purposes of the Christian faith. They may differ, and may engage in mutually helpful comparisons; but deep in the heart of a great mystery the very rarity of the air will suffocate the spirit of wrangling. How often it happens than when a meeting is beginning to waste itself and its strength in petty dispute, some speaker, of large and fruitful vision, rises, and, as we say, "lifts the whole subject to a higher plane," and on more lofty altitudes all frivolous bickering is stilled. Yes, the antidote to wrangling is sublimity. The rare atmosphere of the one makes the other impossible: the common gazing into great mysteries hushes little discords into peace.

So wrangling seeks the side issue. But Christ would not strive. He would not be diverted from the main issues of life and destiny. He observed a strict economy in His resources. He would not suffer His strength to leak away in frivolous dispute. He had not come to engage in strife, He had come that we might have life. He had not come to wrangle about legalities and trivialities, but to procure the world's redemption. From that main and dominant issue He would never permit Himself to be seduced. "I have a baptism to be baptized with"; on that appalling yet glorious way He steadfastly set His face—He never turned aside to wrangle—and His steadfastness was one of the gifts of the Spirit. Brethren, that is how the Spirit of the Lord will work in us. It will make us feel most at home in the heavenly places. It will make us feel out of place in small disputes. It will make the sublime our native air. It will make the supernatural natural unto us. Our feet shall stand in a large place. We shall contemplate vast issues. We shall live for big ends. We shall have no taste for the trifling. The close, fœtid temper of wrangling will be made impossible by the strong pure wind that blows from the larger hills of love. "The servant of the Lord must not strive." "I will put My Spirit upon Him . . . . and He shall not strive."

"He shall not strive, nor cry." The Messiah shall not cry. His coming and His going shall not be a shriek. And what is that but to say that His life shall not be sensational? "He shall not cry." There shall be nothing "loud" about the Master; nothing glaring, nothing over-emphasised, nothing over-done. There shall be nothing of the screech, smiting the senses with startling impact; nothing of the loud shock, nothing sensational. "He shall not cry."

How true that is of the life of the Lord! There is nothing of the shriek! What an absence of the sensational! What an economy of power! What restraint! How sensational he might have been! "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He shall give Me more than twelve legions of angels." "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth." Yea, verily, how sensational He might have been. And yet, so full was He of sweet restraint that the people seem to have been more surprised with His graciousness than with His power. He had not come to startle, but to win; to conciliate, not to coerce. "Come now and let us reason together" was the pervading tone of His ministry. And so He put restraint upon His power, but gave no limit to His grace. He was almost niggardly with miracles; He was prodigal with love. Such is the fruit of the Spirit! The man who is filled with the Spirit of God has no desire to make a sensation. "He shall not cry." The shriek is absent. His lightning commonly sheds itself abroad as sunbeams. His thunder commonly breaks itself up into the music of gracious speech. His life is not loud. All he asks is "room to deny Himself"; "content to fill a little space if God be glorified."

"He shall not strive, nor cry." Wrangling is absent. Loudness is absent. "Neither shall any man hear His voice in the streets." How true is that word concerning the Lord: "Neither shall any man hear His voice in the streets." Christ abhorred a mere street-religion. He loved the religion that prayed and glowed in the closet, and that radiated its influence out into the street. But a mere street-religion he hated. He told us more than once of men who love to "pray standing at the corner of the street that they may be seen of men," and He bade us be not like unto them. He could not do with a piety that advertised itself to gain public applause. No man, says my text, shall "hear His voice in the streets." If he went to pray, then the midnight or the early dawn shall be a convenient season, and the desert or some remote height shall be an appropriate place. "Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door pray to thy Father which is in secret." No man shall hear the Master in a self-advertising piety; no man shall hear His voice in the streets engaged in a notoriety hunt, which seeks its ends by the use of unctuous speech. He who is truly anointed with the Holy Ghost, when he does lift up his voice, shall do it not to advertise himself, but, I say with reverence, to advertise his God. Christ revealed the Father! Again and again He seemed to wrestle with the imperfections of human speech, to make it clear to us that He sought alone the honour and the glory of His Father's name. He was always drawing back the curtain. "The words that ye hear are not mine." "I speak not of Myself." "The Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works." Not to honour Himself, for then He said His honour would be nothing, but to honour His Father—that was the end and purpose of speech and of work. Such is the fruit of the Spirit. "I will put My Spirit upon Him" . . . . and no man "shall hear His voice in the street." When the Holy Spirit possesses a man, religion is not an affair of the street corner; it is not a medium of self-advertisement; it is not a means for gaining public applause. Life, filled with the Spirit, "vaunteth not itself," it hides under "the shadow of the Almighty," and it makes its boast in God.

"He shall not strive." Wrangling shall be absent. "He shall not cry." Loudness shall be absent. "Neither shall any man hear His voice in the street." Self-advertisement shall be absent. "A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench." Then there is to be an absence of harshness, an absence of severe pitilessness, an absence of that spirit of savage recoil from those who have deceived us. You cut a reed from its root and, as is a very common custom in Syria to-day, you use it as a staff on which to lean. When the road leaves the plain, and begins to climb the hill, you place a weightier dependence upon your support, you lean more heavily upon your staff, and often it happens that the poor reed yields before the confiding pressure and fails you, becoming cracked and bruised. Now what can you do with a reed which has failed you, which has collapsed beneath your weight just when you needed its support? Why, complete the destruction. Break it impatiently into a dozen pieces and cast it aside as a worthless thing. And is not this a symbol of how we too commonly treat our brethren who have failed us? We counted upon their faithfulness. We trustingly leaned upon them in a moment of peculiar strain. We depended upon them in some high crisis of our affairs, and they failed us. They broke their word. They betrayed our trust. The staff became a bruised reed. How prone we are to deal harshly with them! How inclined we are to manifest towards them an indignation which has in it more of chagrin at our own disappointment than of zeal for the honour of our Lord! With what hasty impatience we cast off the treacherous brother, and throw him aside as an utterly worthless and hopeless thing! But that was not the Master's way. He would not "break the bruised reed." He was tenderly pitiful towards men who had failed. He would not "quench the smoking flax." When the oil in the lamp failed, and the genial and cheering flame became an offensive smoke, when religious devotion in some life was sadly changing into a cool formality, when a bright enthusiasm smouldered down into an interest that was only lukewarm, when fervour was turning into indifference, when He beheld symptoms of spiritual decline, He would not quench the smoking flax by an outpouring of suspicion or contempt. The Lord was ever pitiful with the faint-hearted, with those whose light was burning only dimly, and He ever sought, by a tender and reinforcing sympathy, to nurse them back again into a bright and passionate spiritual life. My brethren, don't you think this is a grace of which we have peculiar need to-day—tenderness towards failures? Is it not the special equipment of the Christian ministry—a disposition which seeks to heal those that are bruised, a disposition which seeks to restore those who, when a demand was made upon their resources, failed and collapsed before the strain? I think it is not without suggestion that in that radiant list of graces which the Apostle Paul has enumerated as the adornments of the Christian life, he gives the first place to the grace of pity. "Put ye on a heart of pity." Brethren, be it ours to startle and to win the world by the absence in our life of pitilessness and harshness and all selfish severity. Be it ours to win our spiritual conquests by a persistent and confiding hopefulness, not breaking the bruised reed, not quenching the smoking flax, but seeking the restoration of our brother by a willing and prodigal communication of ourselves in the spiritual treasures which have been given to us by God.

IX

THE ENERGY OF GRACE

"In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace, wherein He hath abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence."—EPH. i. 7, 8.

"ACCORDING to the riches of His grace, wherein He hath abounded towards us." I recently pronounced the words aloud as I walked alone in a beautiful twilight by the fringe of the incoming sea. The truth in nature seemed to recognise the truth in revelation. They appeared to grasp hands. Deep called unto deep, and they offered each other the help of a mutual interpretation. It is wonderful how frequently an old and unsuggestive word will glow with vivid significance when proclaimed in new surroundings! "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt." I read these words when standing upon a bold headland, on a day of warm and genial light, with a little breeze playing through it, which was burdened with the essence of the brine; and the one offered itself as commentary upon the other. I knew the meaning of sanctified conversation, intercourse that is warm and genial and cheering, and yet bracing and invigorating by reason of the truth-laden spirit which blows from the infinite. "Always with grace, yet seasoned with salt." "Renewed by His spirit in the inner man." The word repeated itself to me with acquired emphasis as I emerged from a sultry glebe, where the atmosphere had been close and stagnant and oppressive, and I stood in the pure, cool, moving air of the heights. "Refreshed by His spirit in the inner man." And once again I read the words of my text to the accompaniment of the jubilant roar and the majestic advance of the incoming tide. "According to the riches of His grace, wherein He hath abounded towards us!" The onrush of the ocean seemed to get into the words. I could feel a magnificent tidal flow in the great evangel. The infinite was moving in determined fulness. The grace of the Eternal was rolling towards the race in a wealthy and glorious flood. "According to the riches of His grace, wherein He hath abounded towards us."

I am grateful for this comment of the ocean tide. I am grateful for its suggestion of unspeakable energy in the ministry of grace. Grace is too commonly regarded as a pleasing sentiment, a sofa disposition, a welcome feeling of cosy favour entertained toward us by our God. The interpretation is ineffective, and inevitably cripples the life in which it prevails. Grace is more than a smile of good-nature. It is not the shimmering face of an illumined lake; it is the sun-lit majesty of an advancing sea. It is a transcendent and ineffable force, the outgoing energies of the redeeming personality of God washing against the polluted shores of human need.

How inclined we are to think meanly and narrowly of spiritual ministries! How we belittle and impoverish their dominion! We think more largely concerning the palpable ministries of the material world. How spaciously we think of the empire of electrical force, the subtle fluid which annihilates space. But when we turn to finer subtilties still, our thinking is inclined to move more timidly, and with a severely circumscribed range. Turn the mind upon itself. Here is a spiritual entity. What is *thought?* Is it only a faint effluence of the mind that remains locked up within the limits of one's own personality? Is thought only a perfume or a stench which dies away within the confines in which it is born? Or is thought an energy, more potent and pervasive than the electrical fluid, disregarding the limits of personality, and moving irresistibly and inevitably from life to life? What if we cannot dam it up? What if thought will be out, and whether we will or no, becomes an operative factor in the common life? That is the larger and sounder way of regarding spiritual essences. Thought is energy. Purpose is energy. Good-will is energy. And even though we withhold from them the vehicles of speech and act, they will nevertheless express themselves, by the very reason of their being, as influential ministers in the life of men.

Now lift up the argument to a still higher plane. I gaze into the wealthy content of this spacious word "grace." Whatever else it may mean, or does not mean, it includes thought, and purpose, and good-will, and love; and we do it wrong, and therefore maim ourselves, if we esteem it only as a perfumed sentiment, a favourable inclination, and not as a glorious energy moving towards the race with the fulness and majesty of the ocean tide. Wherever I turn in the Sacred Book I find the mystic energy at work. It operates in a hundred diverse ways, but in every instance it works and energises as an unspeakable force. Let me cull a little handful of examples from the old Book. "Let each man do according as he hath purposed in his heart, for God is able to make all grace abound unto you." Do you catch the swift and vital connection? "Let each man *do*," for "God will make grace abound." Grace is the dynamic of endeavour! "We have good hope through grace." "We have good hope!" The lamp is kept burning. The cheery light does not die out in the life. All the rooms are lit up. Our confidence fails not. "We have good hope through grace." Grace is the nourisher of optimism. "Singing with grace in your hearts." How beautiful the relation and succession! Grace in the heart — a song in the mouth! Grace is the spring of a grateful contentment. "It is good that the heart be established through grace." There we are away in the basement, among the foundations of the life. "Establishing the heart through grace." Grace is the secret energy of a fortified will. And so in countless other places I find the grace of God working away in human life as an energy whose operations are as manifold as the ministries of the light. And now the apostle tells me that this redeeming, energising effluence flows towards the race in all the spacious plenitude of a flood. Grace does not flow from a half-reluctant and partially reconciled God, like the scanty and uncertain movements of a brook in time of drought. It comes in oceanic fulness. It comes in "riches of mercy," "riches of goodness, and forbearance, and long suffering," "riches of glory." "According to the riches of His grace, wherein He hath abounded towards us." "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God."

Thy goodness and Thy truth to me,
To every soul abound,
A vast unfathomable sea,
Where all our thoughts are drowned.
Its streams the whole creation reach,
So plenteous in the store :
Enough for all, enough for each,
Enough for evermore.

Now in my text the energies of grace are more particularly discovered in their relationship to sin. "Forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace." The word "grace" is not a prevalent word in modern speech, and its rare occurrence may be explained by the partial disappearance of the word "sin" from our vocabulary. If we exile the one we shall not long retain the other. Grace haunts the place where pangs are endured and tears are shed because of the sense of indwelling sin. " Where sin abounds, grace doth much more abound." But you may ransack the books of the passing day, and though the life depicted moves among many crookednesses, and perversities, and uncleannesses, there is little or no suggestion of the sense of sin. I do not say it is not there, but men are unfavourably disposed toward the word, and are inclined to banish it from their vocabulary. Sin is a word whose familiar significances are like sharp fangs, and they bite deep into the life. Men are now very busy attempting to draw the teeth of the old rodent, and to leave him with a pair of harmless gums. We are busy creating easier and less distressing phrases, phrases without teeth, which we can apply to our perversities and deformities without occasioning us any pain. The prevalent philosophy is a little favourable to our much-sought-for deliverance. You know the welcome opiates it offers to our uneasy consciousness. It declares that what is called sin is only the result of imperfect knowledge. But the philosophy does not build itself upon the facts of common experience. Where ignorance reigns, the sense of sin does not prevail. Where there is a sense of sin a man is conscious that he had the requisite knowledge. Where a man can say, "I did it ignorantly," his inner life may be distressed, but not with the consciousness of guilt. For him, in this relationship, sin does not exist. "Sin is inevitable," says another prevalent philosophy, "so long as we are bound to a sensuous body. Our union with the flesh is the necessary occasion of all our sin." But all sin is not the necessary accompaniment of sense. If men were to be stripped of their bodies to-day, the realm of sin would still remain, envy would remain, and malice and wrath, and so would thought and desire and will. No, these philosophic extenuations do not root themselves in the well-recognised facts of the individual life, and so will not bring any permanent peace to men. What philosophy and personal inclination are disposed to extenuate, the Christian religion seeks to deepen and revive. Its purpose and endeavour is not to abate the uneasy sense of sin, but to drive the teeth into still more sensitive parts. There is no mincing, apologising delicacy in the way in which it describes the natural conditions of my life. It makes no attempt at discovering more favourable considerations which will set me more at ease. Its revealing sentences are clear and uncompromising. "Sin dwelleth in me." I have opened the door of my life, and have invited sin to be my guest, and accept my hospitality. "Sin reigneth in me." The guest has become the master, and determines the arrangements of the house. I am "the bond-slave of sin." Sin is not merely my guest, not only my master, he is my tyrant, with his heavy hand upon the neck, holding me down, thrusting me along his own determined way. I am "dead in sin"; I am become a mere chattel, my tyrant's dead implement used in the evil ministry of the devil. I am "dead in sin," not a finely-rigged and self-determining boat, with power to encounter adverse winds, and to ride upon the storm, but a piece of dead driftwood, a poor hull, with its power of self-initiative and self-direction gone, the pitiless prey of the hostile wind and the engulfing waves. "Dead in trespasses and sin." That is the scriptural indictment of the sin-possessed man. Indictment, do I say? I recall the word; it is the scriptural portrait of the sin-ridden life, and I say that the common heart of man acknowledges the accuracy of it, and brushes all attempted extenuations on one side, as being beside the mark, and having no relevancy and pertinacy to man's appalling need. "Cleanse me from its *guilt* and *power*." Guilt and Power! Those are the two deadly facts of sin, and they are witnessed to in the common life. I look round and within me, and the evidence abounds. If I interpret my own heart aright, the sense of guilt is signified in more ways than by audible confession and sighs. The sense of guilt has a very varied wardrobe. It is not always found in sackcloth and ashes, lowly kneeling or smiting the breast. I have seen it dressed as flippancy; I have known it put on the guise of a jaunty carelessness; I have known it issue as forced laughter; I have seen it evidenced in a passionate recoil against religion. John Wesley tells us in his incomparable journal, that when he was about twenty-two, before he had felt the tidal powers of redeeming grace, he took up and read Kempis's *The Christian's Pattern*, and he began to "see that true religion was seated in the heart, and that God's law extended to all our thoughts as well as words and actions. *I was, however, very angry with Kempis for being too strict.*" Is that a surprising consequence? I thought that this enlarged vision of the searching demands of God's law would have drawn him to his knees in humble and contrite confession of sin! "I was, however, very angry with Kempis for being too strict." The consciousness of guilt emerged in the guise of anger in a heated recoil from the man who had searched him in the inward parts. So that I do not look merely for kneeling and tearful worshippers when I want evidence of the consciousness of sin. I can see it in loud living, in violent and sensational pleasures, in proudly assured indifference, in the anger aroused by august ideals, in passionate aversions to the teachings of evangelical religion. To rummage among the secrets of the heart, and to survey the symptoms of the external life is to find abounding witness that man is held in dark and cruel servitude by the "guilt and power" of sin.

And now to this sin-burdened and sin-poisoned race there flows, in infinite plenitude, the "riches of His grace." What is the ministry of the heavenly energy? What are the contents of the gracious flood? The inspiring evangel of the text gathers itself round about three emphases. I am told that when grace possesses the life, it brings in its resources a three-fold power. It brings "redemption," the powers of liberation; it brings "wisdom," the power of illumination; it brings "prudence," the power of practically applying the illumination to the manifold exigencies of the common life. Let us feast our eyes on the wealthy programme. Grace flows round about the life in powers of liberation. It sets itself to deal both with the guilt and the power of sin, and it removes the one, and subdues the other. The Bible seems to exhaust all available figures in seeking to make it clear to men how effective and absolute is the liberation accomplished by grace. Here is a little handful gathered in a field in which they abound. "Your sins may be *blotted out!*" "Blotted out!" It is the same word which is used in another beautiful promise: "God shall wipe away all tears." Your sins shall be wiped away! Just as you may wipe a tear away from the eye of a child, and its place is taken by sunny light, and no print remains of the grievous presence, so our Father will wipe away our sins by the energies of His grace. "The Lamb of God, who *taketh away* the sin of the world." "Taketh away!" It is the word which is used in another familiar phrase: "they found the stone taken away." "He taketh away the sin of the world," the huge, unliftable stone, before which we stood in paralysing despair, He taketh it away. "He shall *wash away* thy sin." The ministry of soft and genial water! When a little child, with slightly afflicted eyes, awakens in the morning and finds that her eyes are fastened by the clog which has accumulated through the night, the mother takes some balmy water, and gently washes away the ill cement, and the little one opens her eyes upon the morning light. And when the glue of guilt has gathered about the powers of my life, and holds their activities in depressing and fearful servitude, the stringent, healing energy of grace washes away the encumbrance, and the powers of the soul exult in newly-discovered liberty and light. "He shall wash away thy sin." And so I might proceed with the wealthy array of Scriptural figures. Our sins are to be "blotted out"; they are to be "taken away"; they are to be "washed away"; they are to be "covered"; they are to be "purged"; and all this wealth of metaphor is intended to proclaim the completeness of the emancipation accomplished by these marvellous energies of grace. We have redemption, even the forgiveness of sin, "according to the riches of His grace which He hath abounded towards us."

But this by no means exhausts the contents of the ministry of grace. The grace that liberates also illuminates. The grace that brings "redemption" also confers "wisdom." Our opened eyes are to be fed and feasted with ever more glorious unveilings of the Eternal. We are to obtain more and more spacious conceptions of truth, richer and profounder knowledge of God. Oh, what vistas of knowledge are promised to the grace-filled life! "That ye may know what is the hope of His calling, what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints." "To know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge." "That ye may *know!*" "That ye may *know!*" That is the reiterated emphasis of the word of promise. The grace that lifts up also lights up. The new birth is succeeded by new visions, and the new visions refine and beautify the life. That is the ministry of all vision. The vision soaks into the life and colours it with its own hue. "We all with open face *beholding* . . . the glory of the Lord, are *transformed* into the same image." The nature of our contemplation determines the quality and colour of our life.

"Redemption," power of liberation! "Wisdom," power of illumination! And "prudence," power of fruitful application; power to apply the eternal to the transient; power to bring the vision to the task, the revelation to the duty, the truth to the trifle. Grace will not confine its operations to the clouds. It will flow up into the practicalities and prudences of common daily life. It will prove itself the dynamic of the ordinary day. There is many a man possessed of knowledge who does not know how to apply it. But grace does not leave a man in the vacuity and impotence of mere theory. The gift of grace is not only the gift of vision, but the gift of power to realise the vision in the humdrum concerns of the unattractive life.

Now how do we come into the sweep of the marvellous effluence of the grace of God? "*In* whom we have." That is the standing-ground. I know no other. To be in Him, in the Christ, is to be in the abiding-place of this superlative energy. To be associated with the Saviour, by faith, in the fellowship of spiritual communion, is to dwell at the springs of eternal life.

Jesus sought me when a stranger,
  Wandering from the fold of God;
He, to rescue me from danger,
  Interposed His precious blood.
Oh, to grace how great a debtor
  Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let thy grace, Lord, like a fetter,
  Bind my wandering heart to Thee.

X

THE PERSISTENT INFLUENCE OF FIRST IDEAS

"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now."—JOHN xvi. 12.

"YE cannot bear them now." Your hands are infantile. Your baby fingers could not wrap themselves around the load. Your grasp and carrying power are immature. There are many mysteries waiting to be unveiled, but your untried eyes are unable to "bear the burning bliss." There are many truths all clamouring to be proclaimed, but your powers of apprehension are not equal to the strain. The burden must be suited to the hand. I must let in the light as your eyes are able to bear it. "I have yet many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now."

Here, then, is the principle involved in the text. Capacity must determine revelation. Mature doctrine must not be given to immature minds. An excessive burden will maim the muscle it was proposed to exercise. An ill-proportioned revelation will paralyse the very life it was intended to feed. That is the vital principle enshrined in my text. There must be some correspondence between the revelation and my powers of reception. I must be able to bear the truth revealed. Truth must wait upon life. She must watch for the growing hand, and to the increased grasp she must entrust her larger treasure. "What revelations shall I make to my children?" Well, what are they able to bear? What is their carrying power? What is the size of their hands? What is the scope of their apprehension? It requires a good deal of living for a little bit of knowing—How much have they lived? It is here we must begin as the unveilers of the Christian revelation to the mind and hearts of the young. We must follow the example of the Master. It is not enough to teach the truth. It must be taught with discrimination. It must be adapted to aptitude. It must be proportioned to grasp. It must be doled out with wise restraint, and we must rigorously withhold everything which our children are as yet unable to bear. There is no novelty in this principle. It finds repeated emphasis throughout the New Testament Scriptures.

Here and there it is referred to under the figure of a diet, and from the figure one can easily infer the apostolic conception of the religious instruction of the young. Some are to be fed with milk, and not with strong meat. The food is to be adapted to the system, the doctrine to the years. We neglect that principle at our peril. Even on the purely physical plane, inattention to the diet of childhood may be the cause of a black stream of melancholy and depression running right through the years. Careless feeding in early years can impair the digestive organs for a lifetime. There is many a dyspeptic, pessimistic and pain-ridden, drowsily crawling about in the prime of his years, whose languor and partial paralysis may be traced to the indiscriminate feeding of his childhood. And there are moral and spiritual dyspeptics, with little or no healthy hunger, with no forceful, active powers to apprehend religious truth, with no sound spiritual digestion, whose pitiable incapacity was created in an unwise religious childhood. They were over-weighted with truths which they were unable to assimilate. Their spiritual susceptibilities were impaired. Their food became their burden. They were not able to bear it, being fed with strong meat when they ought to have been fed with milk. Young minds must be fed on simple food; their diet must be elemental. The truth we offer them must be alphabetic. We must observe the principle that all things are not fitting, that many things must be held in reserve until capacity is more matured. "These things I said not unto you at the beginning." What things? Why, the great appalling things, the midnight things, the things which would have stunned the disciples into benumbment, and paralysed them with fear: these the gentle Teacher said not unto them "at the beginning." He reserved them for a later lesson, when they could be introduced without any fear of injuring their timid and sensitive souls. "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now."

If this, then, is to be the principle of instruction, if we are to recognise the law of reserve in our declaration of truth, if the harder teachings must be kept for the maturer years and the simpler teachings for the younger years, it is of infinite importance that the simpler teachings be scrupulously true. Alongside the principle of reserve this second principle must be given an equal place, that nothing must be taught in childhood which will need to be unlearnt in manhood. Early religious teaching is not a makeshift. It is not a temporary garment which our children will be able to discard as easily as they discard their worn-out frocks. We walk in unspeakable error if we approach our little children on the understanding that we will give them a thought, a religious idea, a spiritual conception, which will last them until they are seventeen years of age, and which may then be laid aside for another. The most difficult of all things is to forsake a thought. To forsake a way is comparatively easy; but to take an idea which has possessed us for years and strip it from the mind, and throw it aside as an old-fashioned or worn-out rag, and leave it there behind us in the years, is a stupendous and appalling task. And all this is peculiarly true of ideas that are given to us in our earliest days. We cannot exaggerate the intensity of first impressions; they bite deep into the mind, and are almost ineffaceable. Our old people cannot recall the days that are near, but they have no difficulty in reviving the deep-cut impressions of a far-off youth. It is childhood that lives again in age. It is the earliest consciousness that reappears in the latest days of decline. The first impressions persist through the life. I find the symbol of the experience in those composite photographs with which we have of late become familiarised. One impression is photographed upon another, to which it is quite unlike, and then a third, altogether dissimilar, is photographed upon the previous product, and so on and so on, with increasing additions; but the first and original impression persists, remaining as a pervading influence, modifying all succeeding impressions, and asserting itself in the ultimate product. I say it is even so with life. The first impressions photographed upon the mind are not effaced by succeeding impressions. The first ideas are not obliterated by the ideas of a later day. First ideas remain, pervading and modifying the thought of the entire life, and persisting in our conduct even when they have been deposed by the judgment.

Take, for instance, our first thoughts about the darkness. Many of us gained an early impression—alas! many of us were taught it—that the darkness was the residence of things "uncanny," of bogeys and goblins, and I know not what, who would steal out and kidnap little children if they were not obedient and good. How rarely one meets a little child who is not afraid of the darkness! Well, we are now men and women. We have put away the childish thing Have we? It has been discarded by the judgment; is it exiled from the life? Does it not persist in our demeanour to-day? Is the darkness even to-day just what it might have been had we never received that earliest thought? Is the nerve altogether free from that first idea?

If ideas are so persistent, if early ideas are so dominant and despotic, is it not needful to emphasise the principle that there must be nothing about the teaching we give to little children which we should not like them to carry with them through the years? There must be nothing which will need to be forsaken, for forsaken it can never be! Our teaching must assume the need of subsequent expansion; it must never assume the need of subsequent expulsion. We respect this principle in the impartation of common knowledge. In secular instruction we teach our child that twice one are two. That is elementary and alphabetic, but it is a statement which will remain good throughout his days. It will be as safe at three-score years and ten as it is at five. Whatever expansion it may receive, into whatever complication it may enter, whatever combinations it may share, it will never require expulsion. It should be even so in all instruction which we name religious. The alphabetic must not be the untrue. The simple must not be a makeshift. Every idea we impart to the minds of our children should be a seed, a germ which will expand with the expansion of the powers and the increase of the years. If the ideas are not seeds, seeds of eternal truth—small, if you like, as grains of mustard-seed—if they are not seeds, they are stones, infertile, burdensome stones, which in a few years will become "stones of stumbling," and "rocks of offence," over which our children will be in danger of falling into moral and spiritual confusion.

Now, of these simple, germinal teachings, the most vitally important are the conceptions of the being and character of God. The ideas we give the children concerning God must be ideas which their capacity can bear, and which will never need to be expelled. The revelations must be as milk-food, which will nourish and strengthen the powers of apprehension for the assimilation of stronger food in after years. The first idea of God strikes deep. You cannot give your child one conception of God to-day, and wipe it out again to-morrow. The first conception remains, and if it be false or unworthy it will persist as a disturbing and distorting and corrupting influence throughout the entire life. Where do our children obtain their first ideas of God? Sometimes from a picture. A glance can determine the colour of a life. My mind is even to-day haunted with unworthy representations of the Almighty which have hung in my chamber of imagery from the days of my childhood. I see Him now, a tearless cynical God, indifferently smiling upon a Dives who is writhing in terrible tongues of flame. I see Him now, in another picture, with the face of a cunning trickster, while Abraham stands with uplifted blade to slay his only son. Long ago my judgment condemned the image as false and sentenced it to exile. But through my childhood it persisted, and even to-day, when I turn to the old story, the false image steals back, and seeks to imprint its lines and colours upon my most matured thought. So subtle and so strenuous and so despotic is an early pictorial representation of the Eternal God.

Where do our children obtain their earliest ideas of God? Sometimes from a hymn. I vividly remember that when I was quite a little mite we used to occasionally sing a hymn which bore the heading, "To be sung on the death of a scholar," and there were two lines of the hymn which used to make me shake with fear—

> We do not know who next may fall
> Beneath Thy chastening rod.

What did that mean to a child? I ask not what it meant to the matured apprehension of adults. What meant it to a little child? A God, with a rod, before whose blows little children stumbled and fell, and had to be carried away from their weeping mothers, and laid I knew not where! That was the child's God, and it filled me so full of fear that I had no room for love. The revelation was beyond my carrying power—I had not strength to bear it! Let us jealously inspect every hymn which enshrines a conception of God, and let every picture which offers a caricature of the Eternal be consigned to swift destruction.

What, then, shall be our first and elementary teachings concerning God? What shall be the character of the earliest revelations? What are the children able to bear? Suppose it were permitted you to give your little child just one glimpse of the life of Jesus, and suppose that from that glimpse it were to be his fate to obtain his first conception of God, what aspect of the Saviour's life would you make your choice? Mark well your choice. Note its character and tone. You will find, I think, that you have chosen a very sunny picture, full of sweetness and light. And such ought to be the character of the earliest revelations. They should be brimming with soft and inviting sunshine. It may be needful at a later day to analyse the light, and reveal the darker elements of severity which share in the composition of the pure, white ray, but in the earliest day "suffer the little children" to just bask in the sunny baptism, with all the free and untroubled affection of young and fearless hearts. They can carry the sunshine, and not be heavy-ladened. Other things may wait. They can be given to the larger mind. But with the little ones let us "lead on softly," following the example of our Master the Christ. "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now."

But I think there is need that we not only give our children such elementary conceptions of the character of God as will never need to be unlearnt, but also some true, if alphabetic conceptions, as to the mode of His communion with us. It is not enough to teach our children what God is like; we must offer some true if elementary suggestions as to how He draws near to us. Even though we have saved them from an appalling and repellant misrepresentation of God, they may still be confounded and disturbed by ignorance as to how He visits and abides with us. The withholding of simplicities may be as burdensome as the imposition of an excessive revelation. I am persuaded that many of our children are spiritually starved and checked in their religious growth because we have left it to chance to make known to them how to discern the coming and presence of the Eternal God. They are craving for an explanation, and we too frequently offer them a heavy, burdensome, and meaningless phrase. For instance, they hear the teacher or the preacher make the frequent appeal in the prayer with which the service begins, "May we feel Thy presence in our midst to-day," and at the conclusion of the service they hear a familiar expression of praise, "We thank Thee that Thou hast made Thy presence felt among us." Have our children any inkling of the meaning of the words? Are not the phrases quite beyond their grasp, signs without significance, leaving the mind in absolute and perilous vacancy? We must not leave these things to chance. When we have taught the little lives what God is, I know of nothing more exceedingly precious than to teach them how to recognise God's touch. Cannot we give our children some tiny system of—don't be afraid of the phrase—elementary psychology, some simple ideas of the inner life, and of how the great Spirit moves about it in quickening and in hallowing influence. The teaching must be exceedingly elementary, but scrupulously true. It must be germinal truth, to which much may be added, but from which nothing shall need to be withdrawn. The problem is this, How can we teach our children to recognise the touch of the Lord, so that in public and in private services they may know Him, and be able to enter sympathetically into thanksgiving that His presence has been felt? Can this be taught, or have our children to linger on in a hardening mental vacancy until childhood has been left behind? I believe such teaching can be given, and if it can, then it is our privilege and duty to give it.

How much can we tell them? This much of psychology, at any rate, may be given to them. We may tell them that in the inner and unseen life of each there is something called thought, and something called feeling, and something called will, and that when the great and unseen God comes near to us He dwells especially round about these three, and that in these three we may recognise His presence and feel His touch. How may we know the touch of God in our thought? Here is a word of the Lord God: "My thoughts are not your thoughts." What are Thy thoughts like, good Lord? "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My thoughts higher than your thoughts." In God's thoughts there is no littleness, no meanness. God's thoughts are large, lofty, and spacious, and such does He purpose should be the thoughts of all men, big with the gracious bounteousness of an expansive heaven. When therefore the good Lord comes near to me, He visits my thought, and by this sign may I know His touch. If my poor little selfish thought, that just covers myself, like a petty tent, begins to widen and heighten until it spreads over my brethren like a canopy of heavenly benediction, the enlargement is a sure indication that the great Wonder-Worker has touched me, turning the little one into a thousand, and a contracted interest into a spacious vision. Cannot we teach our children this mode of recognising the presence of God? Cannot we tell them that when they engage in the worship of the sanctuary, or when they pray in the privacy of their own home, or when they are walking in the common way, in school or at play, and find a little thought giving place to a larger thought, a self-seeking thought yielding to a brother-seeking thought, it is the touch of the Lord God; and in the evening-time before they retire to rest they may take upon their lips the teacher's words, and say, "We thank Thee, Lord, that we have felt Thy touch to-day." The teaching would be elementary, but true, a revelation which the children would be able to bear.

How may we know the touch of God in our feeling? Let us begin here. Our God hates all bitterness, and His unfaltering purpose is to change the bitter into the sweet. When He obtains an entrance into human life He finds many pools of bitterness, and His immediate work is to make them sweet. We so easily turn sour. Envy is a bitter pool. Jealousy is a bitter pool. Malice is a bitter pool. Irritableness is a bitter pool. When therefore the good Lord comes near to me He visits these pools of feeling, and by this sign may I know His touch. When malice changes into good-will, when envy is transformed into unselfish rejoicing, when irritableness becomes a cordial patience, when the waters sweeten, and vulgar passion of any kind is refined into exquisite love, we may know that the great God is at work in the wells of our being, and by all these evidences may we recognise His touch. May not these elements be taught to our children, so that they may be saved from an impotent vagueness, and may be enabled to offer the prayer, "May Thy presence be felt among us," with an intelligent expectancy, which is itself the highest assurance of blessing.

How may we know the touch of God in our wills? Let this be our beginning. The great

Lord reveals Himself as a "Spirit of power." When therefore He comes into human life, He goes to the will, so ready to shrink and to shirk when confronted by unwelcome tasks, and He recharges and reinforces it from the dynamic of His own presence, and transforms an impotent isolation into the might of an unconquerable fellowship. This is how we may know His touch, and this is the truth we can teach to our children. When the sense of weakness yields to the sense of power, and when in the presence of duty "I can't" gives place to "I can," and "I can" ripens into "I will," we may be assured it is the touch of the Lord. By these signs may our children be taught to recognise the presence of the Eternal, and for these may they devoutly kneel in the evening-time, and take these words upon their lips in praise, "We thank Thee, Lord, that we have felt Thy touch to-day."

I have thus ventured to elaborate my suggestion in some detail in order that I may make perfectly clear the lines along which I think our earliest teaching should proceed. We must teach not only what God is; we must teach that He draws near to us, and we must offer some explanation as to the modes of His approach. We must teach our children how to recognise the presence of the Eternal, that they may know the coming of the Son of God, and may "love His appearing."

These are not matters of unessential and transient import. They are primary, elemental, necessary, and once learnt they will never need to be unlearnt. They are seeds of truth which can be sown in the child-life with the confident hope of a bountiful harvest. They are alphabetic teachings which can be given to the immature mind as the beginnings of a knowledge high and broad and deep as heaven. Other things can wait. Larger things may be reserved for riper years. But these things, taught even to the youngest, will reveal the Lord God as a near and present reality, and make His communion with His children the companionship of a very blessed friend.

Here, then, my fellow-workers in the Lord, is the counsel I would leave with you. Give to your children only such revelations as they can bear. Apportion the weight to their carrying power. Keep back the doctrine which is at present immaterial and remote. Let the elements you teach be absolutely true, such as shall last, without need of withdrawal, throughout the years. Be prayerfully watchful in imparting the first conceptions of God, and teach the young minds how to discern the movements of His Spirit. Lead on gently. Let the light be increased with the increasing strength of the eyes, and some day, in the great unveiling, yours shall be the unspeakable joy of knowing that your little ones have grown so strong in vision as to be able to gaze upon the enveiled face of the King, upon the undimmed brightness of the Eternal Glory.

XI

THE MIRAGE AND THE POOL

"The mirage shall become a pool."—ISAIAH xxxv. 7.

"THE mirage shall become a pool." The illusory shall become the substantial. "The mirage"—a beautiful, airy nothing—shall become a "pool," a gracious and refreshing possession. The life of disappointments shall become a life of satisfaction. Such appears to me to be the spiritual import of the figure. Let us try to get the figure itself before our minds in sharp and impressive outlines. In a book of travels, entitled *A Journey Overland to India*, I find the following description of a mirage which occurred between Palestine and the Euphrates: "About noon the most perfect deception that can be conceived exhilarated our spirits and promised an early resting-place. We had observed a slight mirage two or three times before, but this day it surpassed all I had even fancied. Although aware that these appearances have often led people astray, I could not bring myself to believe that this was unreal. The Arabs were doubtful, and said that, as we had found water yesterday, it was not improbable we should find some to-day. The seeming lake was broken in several parts by little islands of sand, which gave strength to the delusion. The dromedaries of the sheikhs (who were much in advance) at length reached its borders, and appeared to us to have commenced to ford. . . . I thought they had got into deep water, and moved with greater caution. Their figures were reflected in the water. So convinced was one of our party of its reality, that he dismounted and walked towards the deepest part of it. He followed the deceitful lake for a long time, pursuing it farther and farther, and to our sight was strolling along its banks." It was only the hot and sandy desert plain! Such is the mirage, sometimes mocking the thirsty, heat-stricken traveller with the promise of abundant waters; at other times filling the prospect with gigantic exaggerations, making commonplace tufts appear as magnificent trees, and presenting blades of grass as the menacing front of a mighty jungle. Such is the mirage of the desert: an illusory phantom, an inapprehensible bewitchment, the mockery of unredeemed promise, the genius of disappointment and chagrin.

And now I am told that what some men have experienced in the sandy desert others have suffered in the common life. Humanity is mocked by a mirage more inviting and enticing than the semblance of the desert. There is the illusory in life, the mirage which allures with its promise of satisfying pools, and then mocks us with its leagues of desolating sand. The world abounds in the mirage. I labour for a competency, and the competency shapes itself to my longing eyes as a vision of "sweet security," in which "no evil shall befall me, neither shall any plague come nigh my dwelling." I reach the competency, but I do not attain the security! My environment is still the sandy waste. The citadel I foresaw was only the creation of vapour: it was "a castle in the air"; it was a mirage, the smiling, mocking face of the disappointing world.

Here I am, toiling and moiling, with body and mind on the rack from the dawn to the sunset, weary and perspiring, feverish and faint. But hearten, my soul! A little while, a tiny span of years, a few more steps across the burning sands, and then—retirement! I see the green pastures and the still waters. Just across the sands there shines a pool; and the heart plucks up, and the body toils on, and the sands are crossed, and I leave the burdensome caravan for my season of retirement. But where are the "still waters" and the "green pastures"? Where can the tired heart find rest in perfect peace? The "still waters" I saw in the dreary distance are only the creation of the vapour of the air. The "green pastures" are only the dry and innutrient grass of the desert, which I saw beautified though the deceptive haze of the years. It is the illusory in life. It is the mirage of the world. I anticipated a pool; I found the continuance of the sand.

This mirage of disappointment, what multitudes it makes its victims! You can hear the wail of the disillusioned on every hand. Men and women are hurrying forward to the pools; and when you meet them again, you can tell by their hard and unillumined countenances that they have discovered the face of the mocker, and their soul is chilled to the core. There is nothing more tragical than to be in the presence of a man whose eyes have just been opened in disillusionment. The heart sinks, and as it sinks it draws the hope out of the face, just as the light is sucked out of the sky when the sun goes down. Here is one of the disillusioned! "The eye is not satisfied with seeing!" He had thought it might be. It was only a mirage! "The eye is not satisfied . . . *with seeing*." Nature and art can never provide a pool in which the aspiring thirsts of the soul will be quenched. "The ear is not filled with hearing." He had thought it might be, so he followed in pursuit. He feasted his ears with ravishing music and exquisite song. But the angel of satisfaction never came to his spirit. "The ear is not filled *with hearing*." Music cannot provide the satisfaction which will steep the soul in a fruitful peace. It is only a mirage, and creates ultimate disappointment in the secret depths of the life. The mocked and dissatisfied seeker wandered hither and thither over the wide spreading desert wherever the inviting pools allured. "I said, Go to, I will prove thee with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also was vanity. I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards; I made me gardens and paths, and I planted trees in them of all kinds of fruit: I gat me men singers and women singers. . . . Whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them." Surely this man found the pools! No; he only discovered the mirage. His verdict remained the same. He dropped from disappointment into profounder disappointment, from chagrin to chagrin intensified. "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity."

Disappointments abound: is it possible for us to attain to satisfaction? Is it possible to get away from semblance to realities? Can life become satisfying, and not a cruel procession of bitter chagrins? There is something quietly suggestive in the fact that in the Old Testament the word "vanity" is found over a hundred times, while in the New Testament I think you will find it only thrice. In the New Testament life is more satisfying, and the word "vanity" is rarely found. Men have come into closer union with God, and we never find reality until we have entered into fellowship with God. A disappointing life means an undiscovered God. Yes, the unsatisfied means the undiscovered! The world presents the mirage: God offers the pool! "The mirage shall become a pool." The life of disappointments shall become the life of satisfaction. "Castles in the air" shall become "cities that hath foundations." Thou shalt no longer spend thyself in striving for satisfying treasure only to find that it is but a phantom wealth. Poor heart, thou shalt no longer be mocked! Life shall have its grand satisfactions. "Shadows shall flee away." Thou shalt deal with substances. In place of the mirage God shall give thee a pool.

Now, it is a heartening thing for the preacher to be able to say to himself and to his hearers that these pools of God have been found. Weary pilgrims, fellow-pilgrims with ourselves, who have trudged the same weary ways over the shadowless, burning sands, have found the pools, and have sung about them, and have left the story of their discovery in cheery gospels of grace. Some of the pools have been named, and their very names are full of soft and cool refreshment. Here is one of the pools of the Lord, around which the pilgrims are gathered. What is its name? The "wells of salvation"! Can you think of a more heartening word for the pilgrims of the desert sands? "With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation!" The "wells of salvation." The wells of *health!* They are medicinal waters, famed for the removal of heart-sickness, faintness, weariness of spirit! "Wells of health," purposed to annihilate any germs of moral disease which may have settled upon mind or heart, and to cleanse the spirit from all uncleanness. Their mission is not only to purify, but to strengthen and confirm. The "wells of health" are not only restoratives, but tonics, to put iron into the blood, to nerve the will, and to impart force and freshness to the conscience. I think this must have been the pool which John Bunyan puts at the foot of the hill Difficulty, to refresh the pilgrim after the exhausting monotony of the plain, and to reinforce him for the exacting climb which confronts him. "With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation." That is one of the pools of the Lord, and whosoever hastens towards its allurements will not be mocked by the disappointing sands. The world presents a mirage: God offers a pool. "God is faithful." "In Him is no lie."

But here is another band of pilgrims gathered round about another of the waters of the Lord. What do they call it? "The river of God's pleasures." In the desert? Yes, in the desert: "the thirsty land shall become springs of water." What is the refreshment of the pilgrims? "God's pleasures." Aye, and the real import is even sweeter than the phrase conveys, for its inner meaning bears this suggestion, "God's delicacies." Ask the question again, What are these desert pilgrims drinking as they gather about the pool? "God's delicacies." They are drinking into their spirits the most delicate essences in life, the finest flavours, the most subtle and exquisite sensations.

"God's delicacies!" The pilgrims appear to lack the multitudinous and riotous revelries of life; but they have its finest distillations of joy. It is not always the man who owns the countryside who owns the landscape. He owns the estate; his almost penniless cottager, with the refined and purified spirit, owns the glory of the landscape. Which of them drinks of the river of "God's delicacies"? One man owns miles of costly exotics, and masses them for show in multitudinous congregation; another man does not own a single costly flower, but to him "the meanest flower that blows can give thoughts that do lie too deep for tears." Which of them has the finer perfumes? Which of them drinks of "God's delicacies"? Aye, but deeper and more subtle still are some of the delicacies of the Lord, "the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." The "natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit." They are delicacies which he can neither appreciate nor apprehend.

> The hill of Zion yields
> A thousand sacred sweets,
> Before we reach the heavenly fields,
> Or walk the golden streets.

The world, too, offers its pleasures; but for the spirit they are coarse and dissatisfying. The enticing pleasures of the world are for the soul a disappointing mirage. The world offers happiness: God gives joy. The mirage becomes a pool.

Here is yet another band of desert pilgrims gathered round about the refreshing waters of the Lord. They call it "the river of peace." The pilgrims are sitting in "memory's sunlit air," and their souls are possessed by a heaven-born peace. The world offers the pilgrim peace; but how is the gift bestowed? In giving peace the world attempts to shut two doors—the door of the past and the door of the future. It seeks to stifle memory and to put anticipation to sleep. When the Lord gives peace, He throws both doors wide open. He opens the door of memory, and converts the remembrance of yesterday's sin into a sense of sweet forgiveness. He opens the door of anticipation, and converts the fear of to-morrow into a radiant and alluring hope. These pilgrims, gathered about the waters of peace, gaze back into their yesterdays, and sing, "Goodness and mercy hath followed me"; and they gaze into futurity with the further strain upon their lips, "I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." The world offers peace, but it is the peace of benumbment, a mirage which mocks the soul. In place of the mirage God offers the pool of perfect and satisfying peace.

What is the testimony of the pilgrims who have been to the Lord's pools? Shall we listen to their story? Here is a strain from the pilgrim's song: "My soul is satisfied as with marrow." The weary pilgrim has been feasting upon marrow, upon the superlatives and the excellences of life. That is the way of the Lord. He leads His people among the excellences. He gives them "the finest of the wheat," and His command is always for the highest: "Bring forth the *best* robe." Here is another pilgrim witness: "He satisfieth the longing soul." That is the testimony of an eager heart; for the "longing soul" is the soul which has been seeking greedily, like a wild beast hungeringly hunting for his food. He has been possessed by an aching hunger and thirst, and his testimony proclaims that in God his restless, aspiring soul is satisfied. Such are the stories of the desert pilgrims.

> Ten thousand, thousand are their tongues,
>   But all their joys are one.

We shall find satisfaction among the realities of the good Lord. Let us go to our God, and the enticing mirage shall mock us no more. We shall move, not amid the transient, but the eternal. Our faith will be justified. Our hope will be gratified. Our love will be satisfied.

XII

"CONCERNING THE COLLECTION"[1]

"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . Now concerning the collection."
—1 CORINTHIANS xv. 55, xvi. 1.

ARE you conscious of a sudden and painful descent in the plane of the thought? Do you perceive a chilling change in the temperature? "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? . . . Now concerning the collection." Is the association unworthy? Is the transition harsh and jarring? No such feeling of the incongruous possessed the consciousness of the Apostle Paul. He passed from one to the other without any perception of unwelcome change. The intrusion of a duty did not mar the heavenly music, but rather completed it. The apostle bore the sublime about in him, and so everything he touched was sublimed. "I bear about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus," and everything derived its significance from the quickening light of that transcendent sacrifice. "Thanks be unto God, who has given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ . . . Now concerning the collection." The tiniest bit of broken glass, lying in the rudest highway, can reflect the radiant splendour of the infinite sky, and every fragment of earth's commonest day may become a heavenly constellation, owned by the "Father of lights," with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

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[1] Preached at the inauguration of the Wesleyan Twentieth Century Fund.

"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? . . . Now concerning the collection." Let us rid ourselves of the sense of the incongruous. It feels like passing from bracing mountain-heights to sweltering vales. Say, rather, it is like passing from the springs to the river, from the vast gathering-grounds to the rich and bountiful stream. The fifteenth chapter of the Epistle to the Corinthians is the country of the springs; the sixteenth opens with a glimpse of the river. The fifteenth is the country of the truth, fundamental Christian truth, in which our personal hopes and triumphs have their birth; with the opening of the sixteenth I catch a glimpse of the shining graces which are the happy issue of the truth. "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be unto God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." That is the land of the springs. "Now for the collection." That is the beneficent river.

Look away for a moment to the springs. The apostle is joyfully recounting our hopes and triumphs in Christ. "O death, where is thy sting?" It is almost the laughing, mocking taunt of one who dare go quite near to the old terror without being afraid. "O death, where is thy sting?" The once grim, black, frightful, affrighting terror has lost its only weapon. Death is now harmless as a stingless bee. To those in Christ death has no poison, only honey; its burden is sweetness rather than pain. "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" O grave, thou dark abyss, thou ever-open mouth, ever-swallowing, never satisfied, always a victor, never a victim. Never a victim? Christ is risen! "O grave, where is its victory?" That is the place of the springs. "Christ is risen!" Add to that the firm, clear, heartening trumpet-note of the Gospel: "He that believeth in Me shall never die," he shall never feel death's sting; there shall be no poison in its touch; his passing shall be a light sleep, not a hopeless servitude. There shall be no sense of separation, no outer darkness; the hour of death shall be the hour of transition into the calm light of eternal day. "He that believeth in Me shall never taste death!" That is the land of the springs!

Now, let me repeat the statement that we may the more clearly mark the issues. Christ dies, and by His death sucks the poison out of death. Death becomes stingless in Christ. He hurls back the gates of the grave, and emerges incorruptible and undefiled, converting the closed tomb into an open thoroughfare. The emancipation is not exclusive. Christ has established for every man a right-of-way into the peace and blessedness of the eternities. The angel with the flaming sword has been removed from the east of the garden. I may lift my tearful eyes in hope, and gaze along the "living way" into the prepared palace of the ageless life. And what is the import of this? It means that the possibilities of the individual life have been raised to the powers of the infinite. The impenetrable walls have been broken down. I have received an illimitable enlargement of sphere. I have been lifted out of narrowness and impoverishment. I am no longer “cribbed, cabined, and confined.” My feet are set in a land of broad spaces. I can behold the land that is very far off. That is the glorious burden of chapter xv., the emancipation and enlargement of life in the risen Christ. Now see the beautiful succession, taking its rise in the last verse of chapter xv., and emerging clearly into view in the first verse of chapter xvi. The larger life is succeeded, say rather accompanied, by larger living. More gathering-ground, more springs, more resources—a larger view! More income—more expenditure! “Wherefore,” says the apostle, if these things are so,—death stingless, grave crownless, life and immortality brought to light—“be ye steadfast, unmovable,” let your walk be characterised by strength and firmness and confidence, don’t be shaken into timid uncertainties by every little whiff of hostile speech: “be ye steadfast and unmovable”—“always abounding in work,” your cup running over in rich and gracious ministry. Having larger life, now largely live! “If ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others?” The vaster ground must produce a more copious volume of service. The grander faith must be creative of a richer beneficence. The larger hope must generate a nobler sentiment. Christianity emerges and expresses itself in a passionate enthusiasm for humanity. "Thanks be unto God, which giveth us the victory. . . . Now for the collection."

What was the occasion of this collection? There was a large body of poor Jews in Jerusalem who had eagerly received the Christ of God. Their hearts were as dry as a blasted heath, and they panted for the water of life. They found the refreshment they sought in Jesus the Christ. They turned to Him, and offered Him the homage of their minds and hearts. For this they were excommunicated, outlawed, banned. Because of their life they were denied a living, and they began to be in want. I don't think we are able to form any adequate conception of the intense hatred and repulsion with which the Jews regard those whom they consider renegade members of their race. During my ministry in Newcastle it was my privilege to baptize a young Jew, who had been wooed by the beauty of the Christ into the warmer light of the Christian faith. At once the parental instinct seemed to be benumbed. His father and mother forsook him. He was turned adrift. He was regarded as a dog. He was denied his daily bread. These were precisely the conditions which prevailed in Jerusalem, only in Jerusalem the ban of excommunication almost annihilated the chances of earning one's bread, and inevitably drove the outlaw into poverty and want. But Christianity fostered humanity; faith evoked philanthropy; and from their fellow-believers in wider fields there flowed a steady stream of beneficence to alleviate their distress. From Galatia, from Corinth, and from Rome there flowed the gracious river of brotherly sentiment, which makes glad the city of God. In all this there was something quite unique. It was a novelty in the history of the world. It was a beneficence that overflowed conventional boundaries. In earlier days there had been beneficence that was patriotic; now there arose beneficence that was humane. It was not the sympathy of Jew with Jew, or of Roman with Roman, or of Greek with Greek. The race-lines crossed. It was the sympathy of Roman with Jew, of Gentile with Jew, of man with man, and this I say was a stupendous novelty in the intercourse of men. "Henceforth there was neither Jew nor Gentile." The stern, hoary race-limits were quite submerged in the voluminous sentiment of philanthropy born of a common faith in the redeeming Christ of God.

Now see how this acted. There is nothing that so welds people together as a common sentiment. A common passage through a common grief has united many sundered hearts. It is not otherwise with the radiant sentiment of joy. I have known two sundered brothers united again at the wedding of a sister who was loved by both. A common object has ended many an isolation. Get people to have a common sentiment towards a common thing, and you have taken a very vital step towards a fruitful union. Let the Roman be beneficently disposed towards the outlawed Jew, let a similar sentiment possess the hearts of the Corinthians and the Galatians, and you may be sure that Roman, Corinthian, and Galatian will be cemented together in the bonds of a closer kinship. That is one of the most gracious ministries of the Christian religion. Let a man hold the essential virtues of the Christian faith,—say rather, let him be held by them, let them possess him,—let the transcendent truth of this fifteenth chapter constitute his convictions and hopes, and from his life there will inevitably proceed a river of beneficent sentiment which will mingle with other gladsome streams, flowing from men of kindred faith, and they will become one in the common enthusiasm of humanity, as they are one in the common glory of a great redemption. The birth of Christianity was the birth of a new philanthropy.

Now, it is this vital association that I desire to emphasise. Truth and activity are related as springs and rivers. If we want the one to be brimming, we must not ignore the other. Beneficence will soon become thin and scanty if it does not take its rise in the hills. Begin with chapter xvi., "Now concerning the collection," and the result will be a forced and chilling artifice. You begin without momentum, without the impulse of adequate constraint. Begin on the heights of chapter xv., and chapter xvi. will emerge with the sequence of inevitable result. This collection is related to the resurrection, and if we hide and minimise the truth of the resurrection, or regard it as obsolete or impertinent, our beneficence will only be a spasm, a transient emotion, and not the full and sustained volume of the river of water of life. That was the cardinal and all-determining weakness of Robert Elsmere. He erased chapter xv., and began with chapter xvi. He denied the resurrection, and all the spacious and heartening truths which gather about it; and out of the dry, vacuous heart of its negation sought to educe a river of benevolent energy for the permanent enrichment of the race. "Will a man leave the snow of Lebanon?" Will he really try to make rivers, and ignore the pure, creative heights across the snow-line? That is our inclination and temptation. We try to make rivers, when sometimes in our lives there is no hill-country, no land of plentiful springs. "I will open rivers in *high* places!" and only when we have the "high places" in our life, the enthroned and sovereign truths of atonement and resurrection, and the sublime and awful prospect of an unveiled immortality, only then will our life be a land of springs, musical with the sound of many waters, flowing with gladsome rivers to cheer and refresh the children of men.

This is the interpretation of the glory of Methodism. Methodism is now a vast and complex organism, but the organism is not the life. Before there was any organisation there was a river. The organisation was devised for the direction of the river, not for its creation. It had been created elsewhere. Organisation turned it here or there, just as we concentrate the volume of a stream and divert it to the particular service of the mill-wheel. Robert Elsmere hugged the delusion that the mill-wheel creates the water-power. It simply uses it. The drought is the truest interpretation of the function of the wheel. No; organisation is not creative; it is only directive of what already exists. Methodism began to organise when the river had begun to flow. Where was the river born? Forgive me if I remind you of a classical passage of which indeed you need no reminder, words which constitute a comparative commonplace, but which I trust will never lose their inspiring glory. You want to know the birthplace of your river? Here it is. "In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation, and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death." "I felt my heart strangely warmed!" "I felt I did trust in Christ!" That is where the river of Methodist beneficence and ministry was born! "He that believeth on Me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water!" Methodism was born when John Wesley's heart was "strangely warmed," warmed while he believed and appropriated the saving efficacy of a Saviour's death and resurrection. His heart was "strangely warmed"; genial currents, that had been frozen, were thawed and unloosed, and the waters of life began to flow in quickening and beneficent ministry.

The truth which created Methodism is the truth by which it is to be sustained. Methodism can never become independent of the "word of truth" by which it was begotten. The gospel that kindled your fire provides the fuel for its maintenance. We need the truth that warms the heart. Let the heart of Methodism grow cold, and its river will soon be frozen. The evangelical revival was just a "strange warming" of the nation's heart, and you know how the heightened spiritual enthusiasm let loose redeeming energies which had been locked in icy bondage. How varied and voluminous were the rivers of beneficence which began to flow from the enthused and awakened heart! John Howard, who "lived the life of an apostle and died the death of a martyr," began "to dive into the depths of dungeons, to plunge into the infections of hospitals, to survey the mansions of sorrow and pain, to gauge the dimensions of misery, depression, and contempt; to remember the forgotten, to attend the neglected, to visit the forsaken, and to compare and collate the distresses of all men in all countries." Robert Raikes had his eyes opened to the existence of multitudes of depraved and ignorant children, spending the Sabbath in cursing and swearing, in noise and in riot; and he conceived the possibility of gathering them under kindly influences, and refining them into the apprehension of a sweeter and larger life. Thomas Clarkson, Granville Sharp, and William Wilberforce heard the lone cry of the slaves as they suffered under the English flag; and stung with a sense of shame, they laboured long, and laboured triumphantly, to remove this great blot on the character of the British nation, and to mitigate one of the greatest evils that ever afflicted the human race. William Carey's "strangely warmed heart" was burdened with the irresistible vision of the benighted myriads of India, and he gathered about him kindred hearts, and led them to the glorious task of the evangelisation of that stupendous empire. Now mark the succession and suggestiveness of these remarkable dates. John Wesley began his ministry in 1726. He laboured for sixty-five years, and died in 1791. In 1792 the Baptist Missionary Society was founded; 1795 witnessed the establishment of the London Missionary Society; four years later, in 1799, saw the birth of the Church Missionary Society; five years later the Bible

Society was founded,—and "their lines are gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world." Is the conjunction of the evangelical revival and this vast brimming river of beneficent energy a mere coincidence, or does it suggest a vital and enduring relationship? The river flowed out not only to relieve the gaping wants on distant shores; it flowed in healing ministry round about the sores and needs of our own land. "Everything shall live," says the prophet Ezekiel, "whither the river cometh." Most of our great hospitals were built when the nation's heart had been "strangely warmed." The great energising truths of this fifteenth chapter of Corinthians had been proclaimed, appropriated, believed, and in the belief there had been begotten an eager disposition of benevolence which sought the well-being and redemption of the race.

I therefore count it my function to thus remind you of your birthday and of its significance for our own time. If you wish the river of your beneficence to be brimming, keep near the saving truth. By all means multiply your channels, broaden and extend them, but keep open your resources. If you "lengthen your cords," take care to "strengthen your stakes." Keep your heart warm, and your hand will remain kindly. I would set your affections upon the things above, Christ died for you. He rose again. He is now enthroned in glory. Every hope that is worth cherishing centres in Him. Every glory that is worth possessing proceeds from Him. The purity of your soul, the sweetness of your home and the hope of its permanency, the ennobled fellowship of the race, the glorious expectancy of a life incorruptible and undefiled, all are ours in "Christ Jesus our Lord." . . . "Lord, lift up our eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh our help." "Lord, increase our faith." "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain." "Lord, we believe; help thou our unbelief."

XIII

"HE DIED FOR ALL"

2 CORINTHIANS v. 15.

"CHRIST died for the ungodly." Yes, but what is meant by "to die"? The question suggests no fanciful inquiry, the pursuit of which will lead us into merely fruitless speculations. The question is of deep, practical, immediate, personal import. The word "death" is a cardinal word in the New Testament Scriptures. It enshrines a primary fact, out of which a great gospel is born. "I delivered unto you first of all . . . How that Christ died for our sins." "First of all." The fact takes first rank. It is all-determinative of our message. It must have priority and precedence over all other proclamations. All other proclamations must find their significance in this. This is the creative fact, primary and fundamental. "First of all.

. . . Christ died for our sins." "Christ died for the ungodly." But what is meant by "to die"? We must have some large and worthy interpretation of the imperial fact if we would worthily appreciate the work of our Lord. Have we a sufficiently profound and pregnant interpretation of death? What is the prevalent interpretation? Our conception is too commonly narrow and impoverished. Our emphasis is false, and false emphasis always means distorted truth. The body is too obtrusive in determining our spiritual judgments. It constitutes the Alpha and the Omega of much of our thought. It defines and limits our outlook. Take the first hundred people you meet, and confront them with the inquiry—What is life? and half the hundred will immediately think of the body. Vary your inquiry, and launch the question—What is death? and the thought of the ninety and nine will immediately gather round about a body, a coffin, a graveyard. It is this dominance of the body, this intrusion of the body into all our conceptions, which impoverishes our comprehension of truth, and robs life of its heights and depths and far horizons.

Now, our Lord repeatedly proclaimed that the bodily aspects of things are not primary, but secondary, and that the way into the Kingdom of Truth is by a scrupulous observance of this divine order. No man rightly interprets his daily bread to whom its primary aspect is its relationship to the flesh. "Seek ye first" the spiritual aspects of common bread. Let it become to you a sacrament, and let its cardinal significance be its expression of the unseen and eternal. Let the body be subordinate and secondary, even in your interpretation of daily bread. That is the divine principle, the principle of succession in all ennobling and healthy thinking, and it seeks application in all the urgent affairs both of life and of death.

"Of death?" Yes; we misinterpret death if we allow the body to determine our thought. If we are to pursue the fruitful way of the divine order in our gropings round about this mystery of death, our first step must be to place this clamorous flesh in the rear. Death is not primarily, but only very secondarily, an affair of the flesh. This is our Master's teaching. Our investigations must find their starting-point here. The making of other starting-points has betrayed us into judgments which, I believe, have taken us far away from the Master's mind. You must have repeatedly noticed that what we ordinarily call death, our Master insisted upon calling sleep. When the bodily activities cease, we describe the cessation as death. Jesus described it as sleep, holding the word " death " in reserve. You will remember that when He came to the ruler's house, and one gave Him the intelligence that the little daughter was dead, the Master, even in the presence of the hired mourners, and surrounded by the trappings and wrappages of woe, made the surprising declaration, " The maid is not dead, but sleepeth." " And they laughed Him to scorn," so glaring was the apparent conflict between the declaration and the stern reality. " Not dead " ; cessation of this kind does not constitute death ; it is only sleep. The word " death " must be held in abeyance to express an experience of infinite and appalling significance.

You will remember, too, from that beautiful story which enshrines our Saviour's love for the family at Bethany, that when He heard of the black terror which had invaded their home, He used the same mild and gentle-toned expression, " Our friend Lazarus sleepeth " ; and it was only because of the exigencies of the moment, and because of the practical bewilderment of the disciples, only because of their infantile grasp, and their inability to reach and grip the larger thought, that our Master, with a sigh that one can feel through the straining speech, condescended to their limitations, and using their own abused word confessed "Lazarus is dead."

Here, then, is a suggestive indication of the Master's mind. What too often constitutes our entire conception of death scarcely entered into Christ's conception at all. What we called death, Christ named sleep. The word death must be kept in the rear to suggest some other experience of awful and unspeakable import.

Now, let us advance a farther step. The Master repeatedly declares that He came to save us from that which He calls death. "If a man keep My word, he shall never see death." Insert the common interpretation of the word death in that phrase, and the sentence becomes a dark confusion. "If a man keep My word, he shall never see death." But the saintliest among us, they who have lived and walked upon the serene mountain heights, hand in hand with God, become worn in body, and grow weary, and cease, and we have to carry their remains over the same well-trodden way to the cemetery, along which we carry the remains of the lustful, the avaricious, and the proud. Yes, we have to dig graves even for saints. Do they then die? Nay, nay, they only sleep, for "if a man keep My word, he shall never see death." They sleep; yes, but they cannot die!

Listen again to the Master: "This is the bread which cometh down out of Heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die." But men and women do eat that bread. They make it their daily food, and yet they may be way-worn invalids, toilsomely dragging along in wearying infirmity, and long before they reach the limit of threescore years and ten they fall by the way, and we have to lay their worn-out bodies beneath the soil. They fed on Heaven's bread; do they die? Nay, nay, they only sleep. "If a man eat of this bread, he shall never die." They sleep; yes, but they cannot die!

Let me give you one other of the Master's words. "He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me . . . is passed from death unto life." "Is passed." The great transition is effected. He is alive for evermore. But men and women do hear His word, and they do fix their belief on the Father who sent Him, and yet they pass from physical strength through physical weariness to physical cessation. We hear their farewell. We draw our blinds. The mourners go about the streets, and we devise little memento-cards, on which we inscribe the words, "Died So-and-so!" "He that heareth My word and believeth is passed from death unto life." "Died So-and-so!" "If any man eat of this bread, he shall never die." "Died So-and-so!" "If a man keep My saying, he shall never see death." "Died So-and-so!" We are clearly using the word with quite another interpretation from that given to it by Christ. It cannot be repeated too often, or emphasised too strongly, that what we call death is to Christ our Lord not death at all. It is only sleep, and He came not to save us from sleep, but to deliver us from death. We shall all sleep, saints and sinners alike; but we shall not all die: for if any man keep the word of the Christ, he shall never see death; he is passed from death unto life; he abideth for ever.

But my text tells me that "Christ died." He did more than sleep; He died! What, then, was the Saviour's death? What do we commonly mean when we speak of the death of Christ? We fix our eyes upon Calvary. We see the Cross. We see the crucified body. We see the quivering flesh. We see the dripping blood. We see the face-lines of unutterable woe. We see the last gasp, and we almost feel the appalling stillness which follows the appalling pain. And we call that the death of Christ. That physical cessation we call the death. What if Christ should call that part of the stupendous crisis His sleep? When the little maid was lying in a precisely similar condition respecting the flesh, Christ named the condition a sleep. When all the physical activities of Lazarus had ceased, Christ named the cessation a sleep. May we reverently take the Master's own word "sleep," and use it to name the physical cessation on the Cross, and reserve the word death for something behind the physical cessation —something of untold and overwhelming horror? I think that even on Calvary the body may be too obtrusive in our thoughts. We see the rude, rough cross-beams; we see the hammers and the nails; we see the uplifted Saviour; and the vision is terrible and terrifying, and I pray that it may be burnt into our hearts in lines of fire. But on that awful Mount of Calvary we see the Saviour sleep; we do not, and we cannot, see Him die! But "Christ died." If the physical cessation were sleep, what was the Saviour's death? Since the crucifixion of the Master, hosts of His disciples have been similarly crucified, and have shared His bloody martyrdom. Like their Master, they slept; unlike their Master, they do not die. "Christ died." What was the Saviour's death?

I would now lead you along a way that I almost fear to tread. One can divine by instinct so much more than he can put into speech. We can feel so much more than we can express. And the way is very dim, with only here and there a guiding mark. Let us away into Gethsemane, at the midnight, that we may just touch the awful mystery. The Master is there, and He has taken with Him His three most intimate friends. They can accompany Him part of the way, and then He must leave them that He may continue the weird journey alone. Says the simple narrative, "He began to be sorrowful and very heavy." I think that marks the beginning of the dying. He has not yet begun to sleep; I think He has begun to die. "Sorrowful and very heavy." Just gaze into the hearts of these words. "Sorrowful" has a profounder content than the word appears to denote; it is significant of the grief of desolation; and as for the word translated "heavy," it suggests an awful sense of homelessness. Shall we insert these words in place of those that have become almost too familiar to us? "He began to be desolate and very homeless." Let us pause there. "Very homeless!" He who only a few hours before had spoken so comfortably about His Father's house with the many mansions, and who on the self-same day had joyfully proclaimed the unfailing presence and companionship of His Father—"I am not alone, my Father is with Me"—was now becoming burdened with the oppressive sense of homelessness. The Father's house was becoming dim, and communion with the Father was waxing faint, and this sinless Son of God was beginning to feel the chills of a homeless desolation. I think that was the beginning of the dying. He was beginning to taste death!

Go a little farther into the garden, and listen to the Master's agonised speech. "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death"; exceeding desolate, "even unto death." Desolation unto death! That is the wailing moan of the Saviour's soul. Is He shrinking from the Cross? Is He afraid of the nails? Does He recoil from the physical pain? I remember keenly that one of the distresses which used to afflict the religious hope of my boyhood was a temptation, which I tried hard to resist, a temptation to suspect that Jesus was not so brave and fearless as some of His own followers, of whom I had read in my school-books. I had read how disciples of Jesus, when the flames of martyrdom were rising and curling about them, had almost toyed and played with the flames, as little children play with the fringes of the advancing tide. I had read of how young girls had been tarred from crown to toe, and then fired to illumine a sensualist's revels, and how they had sung in the flame. And did their Master shrink from that which they almost welcomed with a shout? "If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me." "My soul is exceeding desolate." Is he afraid of the Cross? Nay, nay, a thousand times nay; He fears not the sleep, but, oh, He does shrink from the death! Over His soul there is gathering and deepening a midnight darkness and desolation to which no other name can be given but the name of death. He is tasting the exceeding bitterness of death. On now to Calvary, and let us hear the words in which the sense of desolation and homelessness deepens into an unspeakable and unthinkable intensity! "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" That was death. What would follow would be only sleep. That was death—appalling midnight in the soul, the horror of a great darkness, exceeding desolation, abandonment! That was death—the Father's house obscured, the Father's hand vanished, and the Son of God in the outer darkness, in the agonies of a consuming loneliness! That was death — the sinless Saviour out there in the night, in the abandonment which is "the wages of sin." What we call death, Christ called sleep. "Christ died."

Now, that homelessness of soul, that abandonment in the outer darkness, is "the wages of sin." But "Christ knew no sin." And so we are led to the music of the Gospel, which has brought cheer and assurance to a countless host, the Gospel that Christ Jesus walked that way of appalling darkness and alienation in place of His brethren. "Christ died for the ungodly." He died for our sins. A few soldiers with hammer and nails put Him to sleep on the Cross, but it was for the sins of a race that He died, that He voluntarily went into the outer darkness, into the awful eclipse of forsakenness and abandonment. 'He tasted death for every man." He drank that cup for the race. "He died for all."

Now, the Scriptures affirm that apart from Christ I am still under the dominion of "the law of sin and death"; "sin and death," sin and abandonment, sin and homelessness, sin and forsakenness and terrible night. That is an indissoluble connection, stern and inevitable. It is a law, fixed and unchanging, "the law of sin and death." But the Scriptures further affirm that in Christ Jesus I come under the dominion of another law—the "law of the spirit of life"—and by this I am freed from the sovereignty of "the law of sin and death." Under "the law of the spirit of life," the lonely way of the outer darkness will never more be known. By Christ the way has once been trod, never to be re-trodden by those who are in Him. "There shall be no more death."

Let me now call up for review some of the Master's glowing promises which I read to you at the beginning of my discourse, and let me read them in the light of the interpretation which I have been endeavouring to expound. "If a man keep My saying, he shall never see death." He shall sleep, but he shall never know the outer darkness of separation and abandonment. "This is the bread which cometh down out of Heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die." He shall sleep, but he shall never die. He shall never pass into the cold, chilling eclipse of a homeless desolation. We have been "reconciled to God by the death of His Son," and in that Son death is abolished. There is "life for evermore."

Here, then, is the Glory of the Gospel. It is declared that I, a poor struggling, self-wasted sinner, may by faith be so identified with Christ that Christ and I become as "one man." That is no ingenious phrase, the vehicle of a pious but fruitless fancy. It is the expression of a gospel, which a highly privileged ministry has the glory to proclaim, and which has proved itself to be the most august and blessed of realities to a great and uncounted host. An unspeakably fruitful identity with Christ, the mystic oneness of the believing race in the risen Lord! This is the possible heritage of all men, made possible to all men by the Saviour's atoning death. "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit"; he is "bound in the bundle of life with the Lord his God." He is a partner in the deathless or eternal life.

But now to me, and to all men, there is committed a great choice. I can choose to be one with Adam, or one with Christ; one with the old man, or one with the new; one under "the law of sin and death," or one under "the law of the spirit of life." I say the choice is ours, and we know it. If I make this the choice of my days—one with Thee, Thou deathless Christ, by faith and by faithfulness, one with Thee—I shall never die. But if my life be a deliberate affront to the deathless

Son of God, if I turn my back upon His grace, if this be the choice of my days—one with thee, thou man of sin, by obedience and by spirit with thee—then I shall die, nay, even now I am dead, and the great day of unveiling shall reveal to me the appalling fact that I am homeless, desolate, separated by a "great gulf" from "the inheritance of the saints in light." "These shall go into the outer darkness," into the night of awful loneliness, into the eclipse of death. They shall die.

Oh, pray that we may never know the death! When the hour of our departure comes, and the friends whom we leave behind shall speak of us as "dead," I pray that the word may be a misnomer, a pardonable fiction, not expressive of the reality of things. I pray that we may only sleep. May the good Lord put us into a gentle sleep, and in the great awakening may we find ourselves not homeless, but at home, glad to be at home, glad to meet the deathless One, and to see Him face to face!

XIV

THE DAYSPRING

> **"The dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."—Luke i. 78, 79.**

"THEM that sit in darkness." Let us lay hold of the intense and powerful figure. How beautiful and refreshing it is to sit in the twilight, the cool, clear, calm twilight, after the hard, oppressive glare of a perspiring summer day! How benumbing to sit in the darkness in the winter-time, with no genial companionable fire, and no cheery enlivening light! "Them that sit in darkness." The figure is not suggestive of the twilight of a summer's eve, or the trembling expectant twilight of a summer's morn; it is the midnight of the winter season. The darkness is cold, clammy, and chilling. It is burdensome and spectral, weird and prolific of fears. "Them that sit in darkness."

Not the twilight that fosters fruitful meditation, but the darkness which is the parent of bewilderment. We all know the power of the darkness. How intense and feverish becomes the imagination in the still dark hours of the night! How erratic and untrustful our judgments! What easy victims of exaggeration! Some faint and almost insignificant sound is magnified into the prelude of a burglarious encounter. With exaggeration there goes misinterpretation. In the night-time every crack of the timber is the click of the enemy's gun. The rustle of your own garments is the sweep of the enemy's robe. The night season is the period of nervous intensity, of exaggeration, of misinterpretation, of many-faced and chilling superstitions.

"Them that sit in darkness." That was the condition of the race before the Saviour was born. The world was dark and clammy and cold. Life was full of chills, and therefore full of fevers. Faith was numb; the nerves were wakeful. Imagination was wild and undisciplined. The God that touched them through the darkness was conceived as a large-scaled and magnified man. "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself," fickle, passionate, revengeful, morally uncertain, proud. Exaggeration reigned

The natural became the ominous; the momentary became the momentous. Life had lost its true proportions, and was fallen into false and perilous emphases. Pain was regarded as an enemy. Infirmity wore the features of a foe. Adversity was the malediction of an angry God. And still in the night there was a deeper midnight; in the darkness was a grosser darkness still. Even in the blackness there was a shadow, a more awful pall, a chillier and more affrighting presence. "Them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death." What did death mean to these tenants of the night? It meant the dissolver of the body. It meant the jailor of the soul. It meant the cruel and irretrievable break-up of all the tenderest bonds. It meant a plunge into what they described as "the pit"; and "the pit" meant a huge and painful query, an appalling abyss whose outlines they could not discern. Death was the vehicle of poison, a presence whom they only knew as a "sting," an agent of destruction, a "victory," an overbearing and overwhelming tyrant. This was the shadow in the darkness, the midnight in the night; they "sat in darkness and in the shadow of death."

If you want to know the explanation of much of the darkness, you must turn to the first and second chapters of the Epistle to the Romans. The light that lighteth every man had flickered down into its socket. Rebellion against the light had turned their conscience into smoke, which broke only into infrequent light, as you have seen the smoke of your fireplace burst into occasional flame. "Their senseless heart was darkened." In the night their affections became anæmic. The beautiful, graceful, trailing sympathies of human life became cold and bloomless. Hope lost its power of wing, and all the coronal faculties of the life were oppressed and dwarfed in the circumventing hindrances of the powers of darkness and night.

Such was the darkness of the race prior to the first Christmas-time. "They sat in darkness and in the shadow of death." . . . "Now, when Jesus was born in Bethlehem" . . . what? The morning dawned upon that night-burdened, shadow-haunted, fear-filled world. "The dayspring from on high hath visited us." "The dayspring!" Could anything be more appropriate to the fearful hearts of the tenants of night? "The dayspring!" Not the full day, but the spring of the day, the light-fountain, Heaven's East! Even the tenderest eyes can bear to look at the dawn! How sore and distressing and bewildering it is, in the hours of darkness, to have flashed upon your eyes the harsh glare of the gaslight! We say, "Turn it down a little." The little light is a better minister than the big one. "Turn it down a little until I have become accustomed to it." That is the principle. "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." The children of night must march into the noontide through the softer splendours of the dawn. I wonder how the Eternal Son will visit these shadow-haunted regions of night. He might have come, attended by all His holy angels, wearing the imperial robes of ineffable glory, engirt with the supernatural splendours of the eternal day. "When Jesus was born in Bethlehem," He dawned upon the world as a carpenter. He beamed upon the night-realms in the soft warm rays of a summer's morn. He came as "the dayspring," the opening fountain of the day, the first little spring which is to issue at last in the immeasurable glory of Eternal light and truth. We should only have been bewildered with an apocalypse of dazzling glory. We should have been "blinded with excess of light." So He *dawned* upon us; the light fell upon the sore and wearied hearts of men with the soft warmth of an infant's kiss "Soft and quiet as the breast-feather of a motherly bird."

"The dayspring from on high hath *visited* us!" "Hath visited!" Another word which helps to heap up and multiply the comforting suggestion. "The dayspring hath visited us!" It is a relief-mission. There is another strain ringing in my ears which I will call to aid in the interpretation of this. "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, *to visit the fatherless and widows* in their affliction.' "To visit the fatherless and widows." "The dayspring from on high hath visited us." It is a visit of sympathy, of healing, of relief, of release. Such is the infinitely gentle and delicate coming of the omnipotent God. I do not wonder that my text is heralded with the explanation that the beautiful and glorious mission was born in "the tender mercies of our God"! That is one of the phrases whose wonderful content we are not going to be able to appreciate until we stand in the heavenly places, and apprehend something of the stupendous powers and majestic glories of Immanuel's land. Go into the village smithy, and see the swarthy smith at work, with mighty blows beating the reluctant iron to shape and use. He looks the embodiment of exuberant power, and the "muscles of his brawny arms are strong as iron bands." Now see him lay aside the hammer, and with those strong hands and arms, with which he smote the iron, see him lay hold of his frail little toddling child, and with infinite delicacy and tenderness lift her and hug her to his breast. The tenderness of the lifting is all the sweeter because of the massive strength of the man who lifts. Strength is the fountain of the fairest delicacy. The softest water is the water that has flowed over granite. And when "we reach the home of glory," and our eyes are opened, and opened fearlessly upon the wonderful power and majesty of the King, we shall be able to enter more deeply into the apprehension of the "tender mercies of our God," the sweet soft river of the water of life which flows out of the throne of God and the Lamb.

What was the purpose of the dawning? "To give light to them that sat in darkness." To illumine the world. "To guide our feet into the way of peace." To redeem the world. "To give light." The mission of the dayspring was the ministry of illumination. The purpose of the Incarnation was to go into the realms of shadow and night to the poor victims of self-delusion, of exaggeration, of misinterpretation, of terror, and of superstition, and reveal to them the true shapes and proportions and colours of things. The Dayspring was not first of all a redeemer. He must first reveal before He can redeem. He must give light before He can give peace. He must show me things as they are, their very selves, bereft of all perversion. He must uncover masks, remove glosses, strip away paint, and show me things as they are, in their essential and innermost reality. He must "give light." He must show me the real shape and colour of sin. I must see my "secret sins in the light of His countenance." He must "give light," I must see life in true perspective. I must discern what are really hills and what are really valleys; what things I must regard as major and what I must regard as minor; what must be treated with gravity and what can be lightly skimmed. He must "give light." I must see myself. I must see my brother. I must see my God. I must not be left to the impositions of the darkness, the sport of exaggeration and superstition. I am blinded with darkness! I want to see! "What wouldest thou that I should do unto thee?" "Lord, that I may receive my sight!"

"The Dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness."

But not only as revealer did He come. As redeemer also did this Dayspring visit us. He reveals that He may redeem. He sets my secret sins in the light, that in the light they may be consumed. He "gives light" that He may guide our feet into the way of peace. He illumines the world and He redeems it. "To guide our feet into the way of peace." That is not the guidance of a street-lamp. It is the guidance of a pioneer. It is not a lamp darting its rays along a supposed and hypothetical way. It is the pioneer himself making the way. Pioneers are "living ways." Robert Morrison laid down his life in a long and laborious martyrdom in China, and he became a "living way" to guide our feet into the thought and need of the Chinese Empire. David Livingstone laid down his life in Africa, and became a "living way" to guide our feet into the heart of that dark continent. The pioneer is the living way into undiscovered realms. There was a land called "peace," a land which the children of the shadow and the night were unable to find. We had heard of it, we had hungered for it, but we could never find the way. And he who was the Dayspring became our pioneer ; and in ways ineffably exalted above the pioneers of transient time, He laid down His life for us, and became the "living way" through Whom we find the land and bliss of eternal peace.

XV

THE UNBELIEF OF THE FOOL

"The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God."—PSALMS xiv. 1.

"THE fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." That is what the fool said, but it is the way in which he said it that revealed him to be a fool. There are souls that just whisper to themselves, "There is no God," and the secret utterance seems to chill their blood and fill them with benumbing fear. Repeated calamity comes upon a man. The floods are out. All his ways are broken up. The lines of his life are filled with perversity. Confusion reigns. He moves amid his desolation, himself confused and desolate, and now and again a thought sweeps across his heart with the chilling touch of a cold night-wind, "There is no God." Is he a fool, the fool of the text? He is eagerly groping his way, as though feeling for some longed-for presence, like a blind man reaching out for some tangible support, and he touches nothing. He sighs in his failure, and whispers, "There is no God." But again he gropes; "Oh that I knew where I might find Him!" In his sorrow and calamity he is like a little child in the evening time, lost amid the multitudinous windings of some great city, inquiring his way home. He is feeling his way to God; and if in the sense of a great vacancy his heart should fearingly say, "There is no God," it deepens his sense of orphanage, and fills him with an aching loneliness and pain. No; that is not the man of my text. He is seeking, and "he that seeketh findeth," and shall at length find himself at home with God.

Who, then, is this fool of the text? Let us read it again, and let us read between the lines. "The fool hath said" — now we must insert a shout of Satanic laughter — "There is no God." We miss the meaning of the words if we leave out the laugh. How much the laugh reveals! I am told that a band of soldiers bowed before the Saviour and said, "Hail, King of the Jews." It sounds like reverent worship: "Hail, King of the Jews." But if we put the soldiers' coarse laugh into the spoken words, they are revealed as cruel and horrible blasphemy. And so with the words of my text. Into the fool's words we must put the fool's laugh. The fool said, "There is no God," and he said it with a laugh, a flippant laugh, a laugh that suggested a glad relief. Now, Scripture affirms that the man who can say, "There is no God," and say it jubilantly, with an air of welcome triumph, with a laugh, is a fool; and by fool is meant something more than silly, unwise, or senseless. The word "fool" as used in the Scriptures is much more than a merely intellectual term denoting want of judgment. It is a moral term denoting lack of virtue. The fool of the Scriptures is a man who has fallen away, little by little, *degree* by *degree*, until he is a *degraded* man. A fool is a vile man, morally degenerate. Here, then, is the full force of my text—the man who says, with an air of laughing and self-satisfied triumph, "There is no God," is a vile man; at his heart there is moral rottenness; he is a fool!

There is, therefore, in addition to what we call honest unbelief, a laughing and bragging unbelief, which is born out of sin. If we track it to its root we shall find that it is the outcome, not of a sensitive and groping spirit, but of a violated conscience, a broken moral law. Its source is vicious. Its root is immoral. The man is a fool at his heart. Let us follow this for a moment. "The vile man hath said in his heart, There is no God." Why does the vile man say, "There is no God"? Because that is what the vile man has wished to believe. The wish was "father to the thought." In that familiar phrase we express a profound philosophy. Our wishing is the father of much of our thinking. Our desires colour and determine many of our judgments. I do not think we sufficiently consider the power and often the tyranny which our wishes exercise over our minds. We sometimes speak about an idle wish. Wishes are not always idle; perhaps they are never so. They play about our thoughts and influence them, leading them along particular lines to particular conclusions. That is an everyday occurrence. It is a very simple way along which we travel. I wish that a certain thing may happen. That wish will not travel alone. Let it continue, and it will drag the judgment after it. I shall come to *think* that the certain thing *will* happen. The wish may become an assumption. Ay, let the wish be strengthened and intensified, and I may come to judge that the certain thing *has* happened. The wish may become an assumption; the assumption may become a conviction. A strong wish may influence me into thinking that a certain thing *is* which is not! My judgment may be based not upon the fact of an occurrence, but upon the strength of my own wish. The wish is father to the thought. Here, then, is the fool of my text, who has come to think there is no God. He has wished it so long that he has come to think it. His wishes have determined his thoughts. But what has determined his wishes? His character. The nature of the man's wishes is determined by the nature of his inner life. Our wishes rise as naturally and as inevitably out of our being as sweet fragrance exhales from a rose, and a noisome stench from a cesspool. A heart that is as a beautiful garden, filled with the flowers of the Spirit, will exhale wishes full of sweet and pleasant influence; but a heart that is only a moral cesspool will exhale wishes of vicious and poisonous stench. As we are, we wish; as we wish, we think; as we think, we judge. This man of the text had the cesspool in his heart. He was ungodly at the core. He began to wish there was no God; and at last, with impious hilarity and with a note of unholy triumph, "the fool said in his heart, There is no God." Here, then, is the truth I wish to emphasise, that the tendency of sin is to make for unbelief, and that much presumptuous scepticism may be traced to the violation of the moral law of God.

Let us look at this a little more closely. Let us see how the principle operates on the plane of merely human relationship. Let me assume that I have deliberately done another man a serious personal injury. Well, what is my disposition in regard to him? It is not necessarily one of sorrow that I have wronged him. I may be far more concerned about my own feelings than about his. He lives in the same city, and it is very unpleasant for me to meet him. It would be a great relief to me if I heard he was about to leave the town and make his home elsewhere. I wonder how I should take it if some morning I were to be told that he was dead? Do you think it has ever happened that one man, who has injured another, has given a great sigh of relief when he heard that the injured one was dead? If that be so between man and man, when one has broken the moral law, is there any analogous relationship between rebellious man and the great God? If it could be authoritatively announced to-day in this city that God was dead, do you think there is any man who would give a great sigh of relief? Are there people in our midst who would be thankful to be rid of God, and who would be glad to be able to say, "There is no God"? That is how sin works. It creates a desire to be rid of God, a wish that there was no God, and the wish deceives us into the practical judgment that there is no God. A man rebels against his Maker. He violates the King's law. What follows? He is pursued by a haunting sense of fear. In the quiet interludes of his life he is possessed by a vague uneasiness. Even the bold, bad man has his frights and his fears. What then? Those fears must be allayed. How? Laugh at them! Say they are childish fancies, illusory phantoms, churchyard ghosts! The evil man wishes that they were nothings. He comes to think they are nothings; and so he says they are nothings. That is the only way for the persistently bad man. The only way by which he can escape the fear of God is to say, "There is no God"; and to this impious conclusion he is driven by the terrible force of his own sin. "The fool says in his heart, There is no God."

This is as true in the history of nations as it is in the history of individuals. You will find that a period of coarse, dogmatic unbelief, of blunt and almost savage negation, has ever been coincident with national folly, with widespread national shame. The nation has again and again sunk into obscurity and profligacy, and from its degradation you can hear the wild, triumphant shout, "There is no God." Go into the latter part of the seventeenth century, or into the early part of the eighteenth, and you will find that the national thought was shaped and determined by the national life. Ungodly living was the father of ungodly thinking. Much of the nation's unbelief sprang from the nation's sin. The corrupt nation desired to be rid of the thought of God, and so it persuaded itself into an unbelief which affirmed, "There is no God." In men and in nations the frequent outcome of folly and of sin is a blatant and mock-heroic unbelief.

Now, I do not wish to say that the fool arrives at his savage unbelief in a day. That is often the ultimate conclusion attained through sin. But there are intermediate stages in this path of moral and spiritual degradation. It may be that a man's sin has not yet brought him to this final negation of God, while yet he may have assuredly started upon the steep decline which leads to it. It may be that there are souls who are in the way to a bragging and cynical unbelief, and who have not yet noticed the early symptoms which unmistakably reveal their decline. Let us look at it. When a man has taken some impurity into his heart, the first result may not be open and bragging unbelief. When a worm gets into the root of a sensitive plant, the first result may be a sense of general sickliness, a loss of brightness, an unhealthy drooping at the leaf. And when some worm gets into a man's heart, when some secret sin crawls into his soul—when, say, the love of money gets into his roots, or some unnamable lust, or an evil spirit of bitterness or revenge, then there creeps over that man's religious life a general sickliness; its brightness departs; all its spiritual interests begin to droop, and his soul becomes languid and weary. Have we ever sufficiently marked that suggestive conjunction in the Book of Isaiah, where the sins of Israel are named and deplored, and where, after their rebellious acts have all been declared, God says, "And thou hast been weary of Me, O Israel"? One followed as the consequence of the other. They sinned, and their sins made them spiritually sickly, and they wearied of God. They sinned, and by their sin they lost their bright and eager interest in the Holy One. Let me quote from the Prophet even a more suggestive figure still. "Ephraim is joined to idols"—well, what then?—and "their drink is sour." Do we appreciate the force of that most graphic and powerful figure? They were wont to approach Jehovah in glad and eager worship. Yea, worship had been their meat and drink, sweet and refreshing to their souls. But now, they have gone the way of sin, and the worship which once was sweet to their hearts now tastes bitter and sour. "Ephraim is joined to idols—their drink is sour." You know that in the physical life, when we are unwell and sickly, the sweetest food, which we have usually relished, is nauseous and unpalatable. The food has not changed. We have changed. Our palate has become diseased, sharing in the general disorder of the body. It is not otherwise in the spiritual life. When our souls are well, healthy, holy, the things of God are sweet unto our taste. The man of healthy soul can sing with the Psalmist, "My meditation of Him shall be *sweet*." To him God's thoughts and words are "sweeter than honey and the honeycomb." But when some unclean thing enters into us, and makes us morally diseased, spiritually unhealthy, then the sweet things become sour, and the things we relish become unpalatable. That is the first result of indwelling sin, a sense of weariness and distaste in the things of God. When sin enters into a man's heart, the brightness of his interest in religious things departs. His spiritual appetite loses its edge, and he prays and worships with that yawning weariness and reluctance in which a sickly man partakes his food. Let us regard the symptom with intense suspicion, as the index of a decline which leads to a swaggering and licentious unbelief. I have sometimes had conversation with young men, who have been lamenting to me their loss of spiritual eagerness and religious relish, and the encroachment of a deep weariness in the worship and service of God. Every man knows when that most dangerous season begins. In nine cases out of ten it means that we are morally disordered. We have opened the heart to some insidious anti-Christ. We are entertaining some unclean spirit, some secret sin, which is corrupting our spiritual taste, and rendering us incompetent to discern and appreciate "the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." That is the first step in spiritual degradation!

But now follow on a step farther. A man becomes possessed by this feeling of religious weariness. He loses his relish for the things of

God. His prayers are just long yawns. What then? Then he begins to sceptically inquire about the use of prayer. A decision is easily reached that for him, at any rate, there is no use in prayer. But he cannot stop there. He needs must justify himself, and he finds the amplest and most comfortable justification in the more general statement that all prayer is useless, a vain farce, a mere baying at the moon. I know that along the line of intellectual inquiry some men have reached the conclusion that prayer is useless. Of that I speak not now. I am now tracing the line of moral and spiritual degradation, and I say that sin begets a deep spiritual distaste and weariness, and this distaste begets a sense of the uselessness of prayer. Unbelief in prayer is one of the foul offsprings of the outraged conscience. When, therefore, I hear a man triumphantly and laughingly declare that there is no use in prayer, I must know his manner of life before I can estimate the value of his conclusions. How has he come by his unbelief? Is it the production of disease? Has he been a fool? Has his moral palate become perverted? I will not take my opinions of spiritual verities from an unclean man. In these matters it remains unwaveringly true that it is the pure heart that sees God, and that moves about in rare discernment among the forces of the spirit.

One farther step in this degeneracy will bring us to the conclusion. A man who has lost all belief in prayer to God will speedily pass to the judgment that there is no God to pray to. Here, then, is the range of spiritual degradation. It begins in folly; it ends in unbelief. The man begins by defying God; he ends by denying Him. Uncleanness has worked to spiritual death. What, then, shall be the fruitful warning which we may apply to the guidance of our own spirits? Beware of the entrance of all uncleanness. "Create in me a clean heart, O God." A life which is preserved in spiritual purity will move in constant homage before the revealed presence of the Eternal God. "Search me, O God, and try me, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

XVI

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THE BAPTISM OF FIRE

"I baptize you with water . . . He shall baptize you with fire."—MATTHEW iii. 11.

WATER and fire! Our two great cleansing ministrants! The means we employ to rid ourselves of refuse and filth! Which is the more searching, the more powerful agent, water or fire? There are some deeply established uncleannesses for which the action of water is not sufficiently stringent. In many cases of contagious disease, if we are to rid ourselves of every vestige of corruption, there are many things which must be burnt. The germs of the contagion could not be washed away. They must be consumed away. Water would be altogether insufficient. We need fire! Fire is our most effective purifying minister, a powerful and relentless enemy of disease. In 1665 London was in the grip of that terrible Plague, the horrors of which may still be felt through the pages of Defoe. The disease germs were hiding and breeding and multiplying everywhere. Every corner became a nest of contagion. Nothing could be found to displace it. In the following year the Great Fire broke out, and the plague-smitten city was possessed by the spirit of burning. London was literally baptized with fire, which sought out the most secret haunts of the contagion, and in the fiery baptism the evil genius of corruption gave place to the sweet and friendly genius of health. Fire accomplished quite easily what water would never have attained. And so in a comparison of fire and water as cleansing and redeeming agencies, common experience tells us that fire is the keener, the more searching, the more powerful, the more intense.

Well, now, here is John the Baptist, the last and the first of the prophets, heralding the kingdom of God. John the Baptist is a great man; "among them that are born of women none greater." He is a man with a clear and definite message, and therefore with a clear and definite mission. He is engaged in the holy task of calling men to repentance, of summoning them to more serious thought, to purer and sweeter feeling, to a larger and more unselfish life. The purpose of his mission is the cleansing of the human heart. "I baptize you with water." The baptism of John is a baptism by no means to be despised, but over and above his own baptism he exalts the baptism of the Christ. "I baptize you with water . . . He shall baptize you with fire." He brings into contrast the cleansing and reviving powers of the two baptisms. If you will pay heed to my counsel, be faithful to my teaching, a purging influence shall begin to work in your lives. But the cleansing influence which is created within you by my baptism has only the power of water. There is a purity, a passionate holiness, which cannot be gained by my cleansing. I baptize you with water. But when the Christ is come, He will create within you the cleansing powers which shall operate in your lives like fire, redeeming influences more thorough, more penetrating, and more vital. When He is come, He will change water into fire, a spirit of cold obedience into a burning enthusiasm, a lukewarm and dutiful disposition into the eager passion of love. I baptize you with water . . . He shall baptize you with fire."

Now let us confine ourselves for a little while to one line of inquiry, and see how this deep and powerful change might be effected. Let us approach the subject by the path of analogy.

You know how immensely wide is the contrast in the effects produced upon the minds of children in presenting truth to them as an abstraction, and presenting it in a concrete dress. Suppose I begin to discourse to a number of children on some abstract truth. Suppose I use no illustrations, no analogies, no anecdotes. Suppose I decline to enshrine the truth in a vision, or picture, or tale, and present it to them as a pure abstraction—what effect shall I produce? At the best only a vague and stupid wonder. But, now, let us take the abstract truth and wrap it up in an illustration. Let it shine through the vesture of a story. Let it be embodied in a parable or a fairy-tale. What then will be the effect? Vague and fruitless wonder will immediately pass into vivid and pointed interest. But assume still further that we present the truth, not in an interesting story, but in an actual personality, in some living, breathing man. Then the influence produced will still further be deepened; the feelings created will be far more vivid and intense.

Let me attempt to give this analogy greater definiteness by somewhat narrowing its range. Suppose I take the subject of heroism and discuss it before an assembly of children as an abstraction. I deal with it philosophically. I analyse it into its various mental and moral ingredients, and discuss the many minor attributes of which it is composed. What impression shall I create? Little or none; nothing more than an uneasy and fearful wonder. But now, instead of dealing with heroism as an abstraction, let me put it into a tale, and tell them the story of some courageous man, the story of a Livingstone, or a Damien, or a Gordon. At once the shifting, indifferent wonder changes into a keen and interested attention. But let me go further, and instead of embodying the virtue in the story of some brave man, let the truth become incarnate, let the "Word become flesh," and let me produce the heroic man himself, engaged in the heroic life. What, then, will be the result? The pointless wonder which followed the abstraction will change into a passionate admiration, which will further ripen into a fertile love. Now, what is the principle upon which all this is based? It is just this, that the operative influences which are created by truth in the heart of a child are determined in their depth and energy by the manner of its presentation, by the stage which has been reached on the pathway which begins in truth as an abstraction, and ends in truth as an incarnation. From abstraction to personality carries the feelings from chilling and indifferent wonder to eager and passionate love.

Now, see how this applies to the revelation of God and man's relationship to Him. In the earliest days God was almost an abstraction to His people. What was His name? "I am that I am." What can you make of that? There is no colour in it, nothing to lay hold of, nothing to lean upon. "I am that I am," a revelation just calculated to awake a feeling of wonder and fear. That was one of the earliest names in which the character of God embodied itself. But step by step God reveals Himself in experiences which create more definite and winsome names, and these names find their way into song and story. He begins to be known as "Refuge," as "Rock," as "Tower," as "Shield." He comes to be regarded as man's "Shepherd," because of the shepherdliness which His people perceive in the growing scope of His dealings with them. Put that name "Shepherd" side by side with the name "I am that I am." The colours of the character are beginning to emerge and shine in the growing light, and as the revelation passes further and further away from abstraction, and enshrines itself in that which is compassable and concrete, the influences created in man's heart become proportionately richer, more powerful, and more pregnant. In the fulness of time the last vestige of abstraction is removed. God remains no longer embodied in sweet and beautiful names, and renowned in song and story. He becomes incarnate in the flesh. He appears before men as the Christ. He stands out among them to be gazed upon—a living and all-beautiful personality. The "I am that I am" reveals Himself in "Jesus of Nazareth." Don't you think that the heart-influences created by the "I am that I am" were incomparably weaker than the heart-influences created by "the Man, Christ Jesus"? Don't you think that the spiritual energy begotten by the Shepherd God would be only thin and sluggish compared with the energy begotten by the Jesus God? The different influences created in men were analogous to the different effects produced upon children by abstraction and personality. When the "Word became flesh," piety became transfused with passion; water was changed into fire. "I baptize you with water," says the prophet John. The revelation which I have proclaimed has made you penitent, humble, and obedient, and this, indeed, has helped to cleanse and save you. But my baptism has only been the cleansing of water.

The Christ who comes will reveal God in Himself, in His own person ; and the revelation which He will make will be so full of unspeakable glory as to create in men a cleansing energy like fire, for their hearts shall become inflamed with an enthusiastic love.

Such, I think, is the great truth involved in the text which I wish now to submit to one or two practical applications. Let me say, first—what, indeed, has been involved in all that I have tried to say—that passionate religious enthusiasm attaches itself to a person ; and the more near and real our intercourse with the person, the more beautiful will be our holiness, and the more fiery-hearted will be our service and devotion. Just think for a moment what magnificent import this revelation in the person of Jesus had for those Jews who became His disciples. The religion of the Jews had become an obedience to precept and laws. The germ of their national faith is to be found in those ten laws which we call the Ten Commandments. But to these ten laws the Rabbis had made countless additional laws, petty, trying, and irritating laws which had come to be regarded as of equal importance with the original ten. To the earnest Jew the warm, loving purpose of God had become buried in a mountainous mass of man-made traditions. It was no longer God with whom the Jew was dealing, but this vast dead-weight of Rabbinical law. God had become to them an earth-born system, a burdensome "ism," a heavy and smothering tradition. Then came the Christ, and the first thing He did was to tear these miles of wrappages away. He cast aside the traditions of the elders. He cried to the people, "You have been looking at an 'ism,' and you thought you were looking at God. Now look on me. He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." Christ lifted God out of abstraction, out of dead regulations and traditions, and presented the image of the eternal glory in His own person. God was no longer a burdensome law, but a great, near, and loving personality. And what happened to those disciples who received the revelation? Cold obedience to law was changed into enthusiastic obedience to a person. Cold and lukewarm water was changed into hot and cleansing fire. Take a modern Jew who has been converted into the Christian faith, and you will find that one of the favourite phrases by which he tries to give expression to his experience is this, "I feel a fire burning within me." What does he mean? He means that the sense of icy discipleship to law has become changed into a consciousness of warm discipleship to a person. He was baptized with water, now he is baptized with fire.

Is this in any way significant of the need of the Church to-day? Are we altogether beyond the need of this old warning, that an enthusiastic and saving and safe religious life can only be obtained by an intimate communion with the living Christ? Is the general church life of the English nation to-day characterised by devotion to an "ism" or by a personal passion for Christ? Are we trying to do by water what can only be done by fire? How is it with the character of the Church? Has she put on her beautiful garments, the garments of a holy and sanctified life? By cold obedience the Church can never be holy. If the Church would be pure the Church must be passionate. Why, the very heart of the word "pure" is suggestive of fire. It is significant of an end which has been reached through the ministry of flame. You cannot have purity without burning; you cannot have holiness without the baptism of fire. When devotion burns low, and personal piety smoulders down into a cold spirit of obedience, the "beauty of holiness" becomes an impossible attainment. But when devotion is fiery, when religion is enthusiastic, when piety is passionate, then you have the very fire from the altar of God, in which all uncleannesses are purged away. There is a phrase used by the prophet Isaiah which always appears to me to be pregnant with a profound truth of religious experience: "The Lord shall wash away their filth . . . by the spirit of burning." What is to be the cleansing agency? A "spirit of burning," a baptism of fire! A flame shall be kindled in the life, and in the "spirit of burning" the moral filth, which nothing else could remove, shall be consumed away. Have we not had abundant evidence of this washing by burning in all ages of the Christian Church? There is Mary Magdalene — poor, wretched, unclean Magdalene, possessing in herself no cleansing ministrant to cleanse away her filth. Judaism can offer a baptism of water, but the baptism of Judaism leaves the deeper plague untouched. And she comes to the Master, and the Master pities her, and she loves Him for His pity, and her love brings into her life the redeeming forces of the atoning God. That personal love for the personal Christ was the fire that cleansed her; "the spirit of burning" in which her filth was washed away. In Mary's heart was begotten a passionate love for the

Christ, and her chaff was burnt up with unquenchable fire.

It is even so to-day. In personal and in corporate life we shall be cleansed by the "spirit of burning." We march to holiness through fire. Like the air, the water, and everything else in the world, the heart, too, rises the higher the warmer it becomes. "Because he hath set his love upon me"—what? "I will set him on high." Elevation of character depends upon warmth of affection. Here, then, is the secret why the Church is not radiant with the white robes of a sanctified life, and is still found wearing the grey, compromising garments of the world. The temperatures of the world and the Church are too much akin, and the uncleanness which is natural to the one still clings to the other. The Church must rise above the world by the elevating force of her own internal heat. The Church will lose her worldliness when she gains the "spirit of burning." She will put on an unearthly beauty when she loses the spirit of a cold discipleship, and is baptized with the fire of passionate love for the personal Christ.

But this is not all. An enthusiastic religious life is not merely the only saving religious life, it is the only religious life that is safe. The defensive energy of character is born out of its own heat. The self-preserving power of a virtue is in direct proportion to the passion with which it is pursued. Honesty, pursued reluctantly, has but little resisting power against the freezing influence of the world. Truth, pursued with lukewarmness, is easily chilled into expediency and compromise. A virtue must have a core of heat if it is to be in any worthy measure self-defensive. And that is the strength of the enthusiastic soul. A fiery heart, by the energy of its own heat, creates a self-preserving atmosphere against the devil. Cold hearts and lukewarm hearts have no protective atmosphere; their discipleship lacks inherent energy, and is as salt without savour, principle without passion, coals without fire, good for nothing! The energy of our passion is our defence! That is a striking and suggestive phrase of the Old Testament Scriptures, "Clad with zeal as a cloak"—zeal clinging about us like a protecting vesture, our defence a garment of fire! The phrase enshrines a truth which has received confirmation in every age of the Christian Church. Lukewarmness is never safe. A man's defences are gone when he loses his zeal. A chilling and benumbing worldliness steals in upon the Church when she loses her vesture of fire. The only safety for you and for me and for all men is that we be baptized with fire, enwrapped in an atmosphere of protective zeal, and that we lay aside our cold or lukewarm discipleship to an "ism," and become possessed with a passionate, enthusiastic love for the person of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

How is this baptism of fire to be obtained? How is this spiritual enthusiasm to be kindled; and, when kindled, how is it to be kept burning? These questions are by no means impertinent. Our modern church-life abounds in externalism, in welcome and beneficent externalism; but I think there are few of us who are not sensible of a danger lest the wide divergencies of our interests should diminish and impoverish the intensity of our devotion. How did our fathers keep the fire burning? There are some words which one finds very frequently in their letters, and diaries, and sermons, which awaken similar feelings to those aroused by types of extinct species which are sometimes unearthed from the deposits of a far-off and unfamiliar age. Here are two such words, "meditation" and "contemplation"; words which appear to suggest an unfamiliar day when the world was young, and haste was not yet born, and men moved among their affairs with long and leisurely strides. Our fathers steeped their souls in meditation. They appointed long seasons for the contemplation of God in Christ. And as they mused the fire burned. Passion was born of thought. What passion? The passion which Faber so beautifully describes as the desire which purifies man and glorifies God:—

Nought honours God like the thirst of desire,
  Nor possesses the heart so completely with Him;
For it burns the world out with the swift ease of fire,
  And fills life with good works till it runs o'er the brim.

We live in a busy, perspiring time, with a thousand clamant calls assailing us on every side; but if we are to be possessed by this fiery thirst of desire, this enthusiastic longing for God, we shall have to provide the conditions out of which the passion is born. We shall have to make time to contemplate God. The spirit of meditation must be reintroduced into our fruitless feverishness, and our passion for things transformed into a thirst for God. Our activities are in danger of bustling out our passivities. The spirit of Mary is being exiled, and the spirit of Martha is predominant. The Church must give herself time to kindle and time to pray. We must give ourselves time for visions, if we would worthily accomplish our tasks. Let us muse upon the King in His beauty, let us commune more with His loveliness, let us dwell more in the secret place, and the unspeakable glory of His countenance shall create within us that enthusiastic passion which shall be to us our baptism of fire, a fire in which everything unchristian shall be utterly consumed away.

Oh, then wish more for Him, burn more with desire,
Covet more the dear sight of His marvellous face,
Pray louder, pray longer for the sweet gift of fire,
To come down on thy heart, with its whirlwinds of grace.

XVII

ABIDING IN CHRIST

John xv. 5, 7.

"Abide in Me." The words proclaim a warning against spiritual vagrancy, against intermittent consecration, against a spasmodic religious life. They throw into contrast a discipleship of alternate spurts and lethargy, and a discipleship of calm and firm persistence. There is a religion of the gypsy type, devoid of settledness, a touch-and-go fellowship, wanting in continuity and rest. And there is a religion whose type is the settled place of abode, a fellowship steady and unfailing, whose inclinations are fixed as by some stupendous force of spiritual gravity.

There are some people who *visit Christ.* There are others who *abide in Him.* To the one class religion is a temporary expedient: to the other it is a permanent principle. To the one class Christ is an occasional shelter: to the other He is an "eternal home." By which of the two classes shall we judge the power and ministry of the Christian religion? The evidence afforded by a day-tripper is scarcely sufficient if we want to know the merits of a health resort, the purity and nimbleness of its air, and the medicinal qualities of its springs. The tripper must give place to the inhabitant: the man who dwells in the sweet, clean air must have priority over the vagrant whose secret lungs were never bathed in the bracing flood. But when we come to religion, the order is frequently reversed. The evidence afforded by the shifting and hurrying visitor is often preferred to the witness of the dweller in the promised land. If I want to form a conclusion concerning the Kingdom of God, I will disregard the religious tripper, and I will seek my evidence among the oldest inhabitants. Let us find out the men and women "who abide," who have made their home there, who breathe in it as in their native air, and whom nothing can tempt away from the gracious country; and from the health and sweetness and wholesomeness of their living let us form our judgments concerning the healing and restoring powers of the Christian redemption. Spasmodic fellowship robs the Lord of His opportunity, and interferes with His restoring ministry. He wants us to "abide" in Him that our invigoration may be thorough and permanent.

"Abide in Me." What is meant by abiding in Christ? Let us look at the implications of the great word. *To abide in Christ is to maintain our belief in Him.* I am to take the claims of Christ; His statements concerning His prerogatives and rights; His teachings concerning God and man, and life and duty; His Gospel concerning sin and forgiveness, and the dynamics of holiness; His warning concerning the direful issues of unrepented wrong;—I am to take them and exalt them into the dignity of beliefs, immediate and operative factors in my daily life. It is belief that creates "abiding"; mere opinion consorts with vagrancy. Opinion is a mental judgment; belief is mental judgment applied. Opinions are loose ideas, roaming at large in the spacious field of the mind; beliefs are opinions caught and yoked in the service of practical life. In opinion there is no venture; belief is opinion risked; it is opinion converted into principle, and entrusted with the government of the life. Or, if I may again change the figure — opinions are the patterns hanging about the walls of the weaving-shed, or resting upon the shelves; beliefs are the patterns in working looms, directing the shuttles, determining the threads, and commanding the character of the ultimate and finished fabric. Such is the distinction I desire to emphasise. I am to take the revelation given to me in Christ, and risk it in practical life. I am to put His pattern into my loom. The weaving of my character is to be determined by His claims. I am to venture on His teaching. That is belief—to exalt His claims into my principles, to make His teachings my assumptions, and to march along the indicated way, even though it frown before me in looming storm and threatened pain and crucifixion. "Let not your heart be troubled; believe!" To believe in Christ is the secret of abiding.

"Abide in me." What other implications are there in the wealthy word? *To abide in Christ we must preserve the means of our attachment.* We must guard the lines of communication. There are certain ministries which have been appointed as channels of grace, through which man's fellowship with God may be strengthened and enriched. I say they are means of attachment, lines of communication; and unless they are vigilantly guarded we become isolated, cut away from our resources in Christ. I do not know how any one is to abide in vital communion with Christ who neglects the *ministry of prayer.* It is a line of communication which many men allow to get into the hands of the enemy, and they become severed from "the supply of the Spirit of Christ" which keeps life fresh and sweet and aspiring. I wish we could change our emphasis a little in our thought about this matter of prayer. We commonly regard it as a duty; I wish we could think of it as a necessity. I think that perhaps the perverted emphasis arises from a misinterpretation of common symptoms. If we could only rightly read our symptoms, we should discover our necessities. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me?" What are the symptoms? Spiritual depression and unrest. How shall we interpret the symptoms? "Oh, a few days in the country or by the sea is all that is needed." And yet, in many instances, a more accurate diagnosis would reveal the fact that the cardinal necessity is not a sojourn by the sea, but a restored communion with God. The primary cause is not overwork, but neglected prayer! Take a blown-out taper, the only remnant of whose flame is a swiftly blackening spark, and plunge it into a jar of oxygen, and the dying ember will revive and regain its lost ascendency. And take a soul whose fire of vitality is blackening down into depression and pessimism, and immerse it in the reviving breath of the Holy Spirit, and aspiration will kindle again, and black depression will change into radiant hope. That is the very ministry of prayer, to keep the spirit of man in the oxygenating fellowship of the Spirit of God ; and if we neglect the ministry, and cease to keep the communication open, we can no more be saved from spiritual depression and unrest than men who are immured in ill-ventilated chambers can save themselves from physical lassitude and perilous sleep. If we would abide in Christ, we must " pray without ceasing."

But I do not know how any one is going to pray with wealthy efficiency who deliberately neglects the companion *ministry of public worship.* Prayer is raised to its highest power when it is the fellowship of Christian believers. Its strength is then the strength of the individual hearts plus their unity. Any man who cuts himself adrift from his fellows narrows his communion with God.

Bright Thy presence when it breaketh,
Lord, on some rapt soul apart ;
Sweet Thy Spirit when it speaketh
Peace unto some lonely heart ;
Blest the raptures
From unaided lips that start.

But more bright Thy presence dwelleth
In a waiting, burning throng;
Yet more sweet the rapture swelleth
Of a many-voiced song;
More divinely
Glows each soul glad souls among.

And so I counsel that, in order to abide in Christ, we guard these means of attachment, these gracious ministries of prayer and public worship. Maintaining our belief, and preserving these attachments, the mystic interdependence will be effected. We shall abide in Christ, and He will abide in us. The Bible has almost exhausted available analogies in seeking to suggest how rich and abounding are the vitalising forces which will flow to the believers in Christ through the channels of an opened communion. "He that believeth in the Son hath life." This vitalising grace shall operate upon the spirits of men after the manner of "showers," "rivers," "winds," "fire," "water," "bread." Contradictory emblems have to be employed in order to give expression to the manifold ministry of reviving grace. But all the symbols and emblems appear to converge in one supreme suggestion—that the imparted grace of God is a force which empowers and enriches the very roots of personality. It is a "centre" ministry, giving volume and force to the very springs of being. "I am come that ye might have life!"

Will all this be regarded as mysticism run mad? Why should it be thought incredible? Do we not know in familiar life, and on purely human planes, that one spirit can flow into another spirit with enervating or invigorating influence? Familiar companionships have depths and experiences which lead to the realm of the mystical. If there be spiritual infection and contagion as between man and man, why should it be thought incredible that in this fellowship that is called "abiding," the Spirit of the glorified Christ should breathe upon the spirit of man and sublime him into undreamed-of possibilities of power and refinement?

What would be the fruits of "abiding"? First of all, fulness of living. "*The same beareth much fruit.*" I am not going to limit that word "fruit" to any particular type of so-called practical service. We are not yet in the realm of "doing"; we are still in the realm of "being." We are still in the inner man, in the secret places of the life. Just think for a moment of man's rich and complex personality. It is possible for men to be only partially alive. A man can live departmentally, and not as a whole. For instance, a man can be mentally awake but not sympathetic. A man can be kind and yet carnal. A man can be conscientious and discourteous. Nay, the severing analysis can be more subtle and discriminating still. A man can be only partially generous; he is prodigal of his money, but niggardly of his time; he is always ready to give you a ten-pound note for Christian service, but he won't give you a slice of his time. On the other hand, there are men who are prodigal of their time, but miserly with their money; they will give you abundant service, but it is a bleeding martyrdom to give you gold. Well, here is a strange phenomenon! How do you explain it? Perhaps Hosea supplies the explanation: "Ephraim is a cake not turned." He is baked only on one side. He only partially lives. He is alive in compartments, but not as a whole. Or to recur to the figure of the text, he only bears fruit partially; there are many branches upon his tree which yield nothing but leaves. "He that abideth in Me and I in him, the same beareth *much fruit.*" It is an increase of fruitfulness. We pass from the partial to the entire, from particular branches to the full and well-proportioned tree. "The fruit of the Spirit is in *all* goodness." When the divine and the human interpenetrate, the fructifying powers are enormously increased, and the tree of the individual life bears all manner of fruits. I don't think any man can ever know his fruit-growing capacity until he is possessed by the Spirit of God. It seems to me that when the supernatural comes the natural can assert itself in wealthy freedom. There is a word in the gospel by Matthew which I think is not without its significance. "They brought to Him a dumb man possessed with a devil. And when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake." The natural power was released when the spiritual bondage was destroyed. I think this suppression of natural power is more widespread than we believe. There are powers dumb because devils reign. There are branches barren because divine communion is checked and choked. The influx of the divine would mean the emancipation of the human. The natural would assert itself under the knightly ministry of the supernatural. Man would become alive, and all his slumbering possibilities would awake, and move in aspiring progress towards a perfect and glorious realisation. "He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit."

What other issues may be found in the fruits of "abiding"? You will find the gracious product described in verse seven. "If ye abide in Me . . . *ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you.*" "Whatsoever ye will." A thoughtless interpretation of that great word has plunged many souls into profound bewilderment and pain. Things have been asked, and they have not been given. What is the explanation? The conclusion of the great promise has been taken without the premises. The offer has been seized, but the conditions ignored. What are the conditions? "If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you." Suppose the conditions were observed. If this interpretation of the human and the divine were an actuality: I, seeking my aim and motive and hope in the Lord, dwelling among the Lord's thoughts; my life governed by my beliefs; the Lord filling my life as air fills a chamber, breathing upon thought and purpose and feeling;—if these conditions were realised, what kind of "askings" would there be? I should be so in tune with the Infinite that my askings would be His willings, and my desires would harmonise with the profoundly spiritual purposes of His great redemptive works. We do not abide, and so we are not attuned, and so we ask what cannot be given. We want lofty asking, and lofty asking implies high planes of thinking, and high planes of thinking imply unbroken fellowship with Christ. "If we abide . . . ye shall ask . . . and it shall be done." And so the two fruits of abiding which I desire to emphasise are just these: fulness of life and kinship with the divine. What, then, shall be the practical outcome of this meditation? Let us begin the "abiding." In his *Novum Organum* Bacon gives utterance to a conviction which shall express the purpose of this concluding appeal:—"The question whether anything can be known is to be settled not by arguing but by trying." "Abide in Me." Try it; try it; and you shall find the issue in fruitful and abundant life.

XVIII

THE GREAT ENFRANCHISEMENT

"Unto Him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by His blood; and He made us to be a Kingdom, to be priests unto His God and Father; to Him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever."—REVELATION i. 5.

"UNTO Him that loveth us." That is where our hopes are born. That is the background in which we find the base and the warrant for all our confidence and faith. God loves us. All effective reasoning concerning human redemption must begin here. God loves! The beginning is not to be found in us, in our inclinations and gropings and resolvings and prayers. These are essential but secondary. The primary element is the inclination of God. The fire which warms the hearthstone is not original; it is derivative, and refers us back to the sun. The candle with which we search for the lost piece of silver is not original and originating; it is borrowed flame from the great altar-fires of the sun. Earth's broken lights, a candle here, a lamp there, a fire yonder, all index backwards, and point us to the great originating centre of solar light and heat. The lamps and candles and fires that burn in human life, everything that is bright and genial and aspiring, have reference backward to some creative and beneficent source. "We love, because He first loveth us." "He first loveth!" That is the primary quantity, and every kindly feeling that warms the heart, every pure hope that illumines the mind, were begotten of that most gracious source. "He first loveth!" When did He begin to love? "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." Up from the everlasting! "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee." The primordial germ is not a material plasm, or a fire-tuft. Let us trace our pedigree far enough back into the love-purpose of the Everlasting. This is the Biblical account of our origin, of the primary movement that gave our being its birth:—"He first loveth." Nobody comes into the world God-hated. It is possible to come into the world man-hated, or with most reluctant and indifferent welcome. But behind everybody is God, and God is love. Everybody's pedigree begins in love. A glance into origins is a look into love. That is the all-sufficient warrant of human hope and confidence.

"Unto Him that loveth us." Loveth! Then the gracious sentiment did not exhaust itself with our origin. "Unto Him that loveth." The affection is continuous; not spasmodic, but unbroken; there is no abatement of its volume. "The river of God is full of water," and it flows near the life that it first created. There is a highroad which I knew full well away in the distant North, and a gladsome, shining river keeps it company. Their tracks remain in closest fellowship. They turn and wind together, and at any moment you may step from the dusty highway and drink deep draughts from the limpid stream. "There is a river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God." Here is the hard, dusty highway of the individual life, and near it there flows the gladdening river of the Eternal Love. It turns with our turnings, and winds through all the perplexing labyrinths of our intensely varied day. We may ignore the river; we cannot ignore it away Thrice blessed are they who heed and use it. "They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ." The inspiring resources are always just at hand. The river of love runs just by the hard road. It never parts company with the highway. "He first loved." "Unto Him that loveth." "Having loved . . . He will love unto the end." "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." That is the point to fix the vision when we wish to re-enkindle hope in our ultimate and perfected redemption. "Unto Him that loveth us." Love is not an idle sentiment, a sweet langour, a gaily-tinted bubble, sailing in the quiet summer air. Love is energy, throbbing with benevolent purpose, seeking for ever increasing ministries through which to express itself in beneficent service. Love is no effeminate reverie; it is a hungry spirit of sacrifice. "God so loved that He *gave!*" That is it; love is an impartation, a giving, sacrifice unconscious of itself. The word "sacrifice" is not to be found in love's vocabulary. Love gives and gives, and takes it as a gracious favour if you will receive the gift. Love never sits down to contemplate its sacrifices. It only sits down to think out new fields of service. Love is tremendous energy, hungrily keen for the detection of need, that it might fill the gaping gap out of its own resources. Exalt your conception of love as of a spirit with a thousand eyes and a thousand hands, and then read anew the words of my text. "Unto Him that loveth us!" "Loveth!" Keen eyes; strong-hearted; strong-handed! What need does He discover, from Whom there is nothing concealed?

He beholds His children in the bondage of corruption and night. He sees them enslaved by appalling encumbrances which they cannot discard. They are the captives of sin and of death. How has it all arisen? Shall I give you the explanation offered by the Apostle James? Here it is. I have a Will, most mystic yet most real. This Will was purposed by the Almighty to marry the word of Truth, that out of the pure and gracious union there might arise all the beauties and graces of the divine life. But, says the Apostle James, there comes along a lust, subtle and bewitching, and it fastens its fascinating eye upon the Will, and the Will is enticed. "He is drawn away of his own lust and enticed." It is a most unholy union, and begets a most unholy issue. "Lust, when it hath conceived, bringeth forth sin," and that is not the end of the awful generation. There is a further offspring; "sin, when it is full-grown, bringeth forth death." Here, then, is the consequence of an immoral union; the soul draws into itself enslaving presences, sin and death, and it cannot shake them away. The soul is in the bondage of guilt. The soul is in the bondage of death. Is this an imaginary analysis? Is its basis fictional? One of the clearest and calmest thinkers of our time, a man who sees far into the secret springs of human life, has given his judgment that the most real terrors that afflict men are the guilt of sin and the fear of death. You don't find the evidence of this upon the surface. Men do not like these things to walk abroad, and they seek to bury them in the deepest graves. But the terror is often the most real where the outer life appears undisturbed. It is often the man who is whistling who is most afraid of the ghost. Do not be misled by the whistle. That is only on the lips, while the terror is shaking the heart. I have heard men speak of their sins, and they could not have spoken about them more jauntily or laughingly if there were no God, and no great white throne, and no hell! But I have not allowed myself to be deceived. The whistling has been the index to the reality of their fear, and not the proof of its absence. Have you never broken into humming and singing to drown the voice of your conscience? Somebody heard you suddenly break into singing, and they interpreted it as a sign of peace and merriment, while all the time its signification was this—a man fighting down his ghosts.

No, do not let us attempt to deceive ourselves. Sin is most real; guilt is most real; death is most real—not merely the dissolution of the flesh, but that which the gentle Jesus called the "outer darkness," the black night of separation from the holy presence of God. The bondage is most real. How can we obtain deliverance? I want deliverance from the baleful shore of guilt. I want deliverance from the power of acquired habit. I want deliverance from the outer darkness of death. Where can the liberating power be found? I turn to those who have closed the Bible, denouncing its remedies as fictional, or at the best as antique and obsolete, and I ask them what provision they are prepared to put in its place. The problem is this: Here is a man, guilt-bound, sin-bound, death-bound. Release him. Take that haunted chamber of the mind, lay the ghosts, and make the chamber into a quiet and peaceful living-room. Take the heart, and turn out the unclean devils of desire and lust, and tenant it with the white-robed angels of faith and hope and love. Take the evil power out of to-day, and take the black threat out of to-morrow. That is the problem, often underestimated because the remedies offered are peddling and insufficient. I am not surprised that men who close the Bible should so often interpret human need as though it were a skin complaint, and not a heart disease. It is an old device, and you may find the answer to it in the inspired word, "Though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before Me, saith the Lord." That is a word which, I think, is peculiarly applicable to our own day. Polish is consistent with great depravity. Culture may co-exist with rank uncleanness. Sandpaper may smooth a surface ; it cannot change a substance. The primary need of man is not accomplishment but character, and for this we require not the washing of culture, but the washing of regeneration. It is possible to refine away a pimple of uncouthness ; it is not possible to refine away guilt. Man can wash himself into good manners ; he cannot provide himself with a new heart. When education and culture have reached their utmost limits, and the mental powers are refined into exquisite discernment, the two black, gruesome birds of the night remain—guilt and death, and only the Eternal Son can disturb them, and cause them to flee away.

Here, then, there comes in the energetic, sleepless ministry of the Eternal Love. "Unto Him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by His blood." No man, by his own agony and bloody sweat, could wash his robes and make them white. "*Unto Him* that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by His blood." Is the loosening real? That question does not suggest an argument. I interpret it as a demand for proof. Call for those who are "in Christ," who live in Him by faith, and solicit their testimony. Call the witness, and let him declare what the Lord hath done for his soul. Let us examine him. What about thy ghost-chamber, the haunt of paralysing fears? Has the Lord laid the ghosts? "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding," keeps our minds. "He is our peace." And how is it with thy present temptations, with all the fierce onrush of desire and lust? "We are more than conquerors through Him who loveth us." And how about to-morrow and . . . death? "To die is gain." The testimony is eager, persistent, unbroken. The loosening is an immediate and urgent reality. However real may have been the sense of guilt, the driving power of evil inclination, and the chilling fear of judgment, the sense of liberty and reconciliation is even more real, and life exults with a joy unspeakable and full of glory. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign, through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord." The reality of reconciliation in

Christ, of loosening and liberty by His blood, has given the keynote and emphasis to the evangel which has been the ceaseless glory of this Church.

" And He made us to be a Kingdom, to be priests unto His God and Father." He " loosed," and then He ennobled. After emancipation there came enfranchisement. We had been in the servitude of the evil one, the poor slaves of an appalling tyranny. Now we are made a Kingdom, we become citizens, endowed with a sublime franchise, the possessors of unspeakable privileges and rights. We are made a " Kingdom of priests." Every child has the right to share the sovereignty of Jesus, and to enjoy free access into the most secret place of the Father's presence. No longer does He call us " servants," but " friends." There is no closed door between us and Him. We have " the run of the house." We may be " at home with the Lord." This is the issue of the primal loving! The ultimate aim of redemption is the creation of a family of sanctified children, reigning as kings and queens, in the possession of spiritual powers, and enjoying happy and intimate fellowship with one another and with their Father in heaven.

XIX

FORGETTING THE CLEANSING

"For he that lacketh these things is blind, seeing only what is near, having forgotten the cleansing from his old sins."—2 PETER i. 9.

"HE that lacketh these things." What things? The radiant treasures are named in a previous verse: faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, love of the brethren, love. "He that lacketh these things is blind." His spiritual outlook is obstructed by a dense and earthborn cloud. "Seeing only what is near"—he has lost the sense of the heavenly, the perception of what is ideal and divine—"having forgotten the cleansing." Let us grasp the order of the apostle's thought. "Having forgotten the cleansing." That is not the ultimate consequence; it is the primary cause. It is not the last fruitage of a prolonged degeneracy; it is the original root. The "lack" and the "blindness" do not create the forgetfulness; they are created by it. "Having forgotten the cleansing." That is the starting-point of the appalling deterioration. Certain primary matters are permitted to pass into oblivion. Great cardinal truths are erased from the active consciousness. The battery of the man's creed loses some of its most powerful cells. Elements are submerged in which reside the secrets of life. Theology is devitalised. "Having forgotten the cleansing." What follows? Impoverish your creed, and you sterilise your morality. There will be a "lack" in "these things." Graces will be reluctantly pursued, and only scantily possessed. A devitalised theology creates a disabled and dispirited morality. "Having forgotten," he "lacks." What follows? Chilled morality results in impaired visions. Men who cease to pursue the ideal, speedily cease to see it. "He that lacketh is blind, seeing only what is near." He sees the small policy, the mean expedient, the earthly and the transient. "Seeing only what is near," he has no sense of the heavenly. The divine aspects of things have faded out of his sight. He has lost the ideal. That is the order and succession of the apostolic thought. A devitalised theology is succeeded by a disabled morality, which speedily issues in the obscuration of the ideal. "Having forgotten," he "lacks" and is "blind."

"Having forgotten." Forgotten what? "The cleansing." In the New Testament there is a recognised gradation in the importance of duties. Some of the commandments are described as "least," and others as "greatest." There is a similar gradation recognised in the importance of truths. There are truths which are regarded as primary, radical, fundamental, pre-eminent sources of holy energy, centres from which radiate the driving power of all assured and progressive spiritual life. Predominant among these primary truths are the truths concerning "the cleansing." Our fathers used to call them the "saving truths," not that any truth is devoid of saving and emancipating power, but that these truths are immediately and superlatively concerned with the deepest and most appalling need in human life. "I delivered unto you first of all" the truths concerning the "cleansing"; "first of all," as of primary and unspeakable import, "Christ died for our sins"; "first of all," as radical and alphabetic, in which everything which seeks to be positive and enduring must take its root, "He was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." You know the exalted eminence which these truths occupied in the teachings of the Apostle Paul. The space they fill in his epistles is indicative of the conspicuous authority which they exercised in his life. He could not keep away from the glorious themes. They possessed and held him by a strange and ever-increasing fascination. He lived and moved and had his being among the sublimities. " He dwelt on high ; his place of defence was the munition of rocks." He was always " from above," never from beneath. He approached everything from lofty altitudes, and everything he touched was sublimed. He came to the commonplace from the blood of the cleansing, and the commonplace stood transformed. His base of operations was back in the saving truths, and to these he ever returned for reinforcement and renewal. The glorious mystery of the atoning death ; the certainty of reconciliation ; the assurance of forgiveness ; the possibility of salvation for all men ; these are the cardinal truths which formed the gospel of the Apostle Paul, and which run like an unbroken strain of music though all the changing complexities of his intensely varied life. " First of all," proclaimed the Apostle Paul, " Christ died for our sins." " First of all," repeats the Apostle Peter, " Christ hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." "First of all," cries the Apostle John, "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." These are the primary truths concerning the cleansing which formed the staple and the emphasis of apostolic ministry, and these are the truths which, with glad and passionate eagerness, they published to a sin-bound, saddened and soddened world.

Now, what did they claim for the Word? They claimed that the truth was a gospel of *power*, the "power of God unto Salvation." These truths were declared to be force-centres, creative of impulse and motive, with power to change dead, inert, and sluggish lives into passionate activity and enthusiasm. The truths were offered to the world as dynamic cells, forming the battery of a mighty, active creed, which would instil energy into every activity in the entire circuit of the life. Yes, that is the word they used. Truth "energises." "The word of God *worketh* in you." "The implanted word, which is able to save your souls." Get these truths implanted within you; get them enthroned in the conscience as dominant conceptions; let them be bold and vivid presences in the chamber of your imagery, and a strong, saving, cleansing energy shall pervade your moral and spiritual being like a pure and vitalising current of healthy blood. This is what the apostles claimed for the truth they taught. They claimed that it would energise the conscience, and purge it from uncleanness. They claimed that it would energise the will, and endow a fickle, wavering reed with the staying power of adamant. They claimed that it would energise the emotions, and transform a mean, sluggish, dribbling affection into the serviceable passion of a mighty stream. They claimed that it would energise the entire being, arousing the dormant spiritual cravings, quickening a healthy appetite, yea, a hunger and a thirst for righteousness, and a jealous watchfulness for the companionship of the Lord. And how they laboured to enthrone it! With what persistence they sought to give "the cleansing" great and isolated glory! With what varied ministry they sought to preserve its remembrance clear, vivid, intense, and influential! How jealously they watched to save it from oblivion! "To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not irksome, and for you it is safe." "I shall be ready always to put you in remembrance of these things." . . . "I will endeavour that you may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance." . .

"Do this in remembrance." . . . That was the burden and the glory of the apostle's work, to keep "the cleansing" in remembrance. That is what they would have called their "practical" service. But take any ordinary commentary on the great epistles, say on the Epistle to the Romans, and mark its analysis of the apostle's thought, and not until you reach the twelfth chapter will you find the section headed "Practical." But what of the great reach of urgent, palpitating thought which stretches across the previous eleven? Eleven chapters devoted to placarding the great truth concerning "the cleansing"! Perhaps, after all, this is the section that should be named the practical. It is infinitely more than theory. It is root, it is spring, it is life! Get the eleven chapters exalted and enthroned, let the truths become abiding factors in the consciousness, let them be contemplated until contemplation becomes conviction, and musing creates fire, let them become possessed until they possess you, and the graces of chapter twelve will arise as an eager and spontaneous issue. Remember the cleansing. Let the primary truths have the primary place; let them be princes in the conscious life; and the princes of consciousness will appear as principles in conduct, filling life with moral passion and enthusiasm, and converting a reluctant drudgery into an exultant freedom.

But, now, obliterate the energising truth. Let it be exiled from the consciousness. Let the cleansing be forgotten. Blot out the first eleven chapters to the Romans. Begin with the twelfth. Begin with what you call the practical. What then? The practical will become the impracticable. You cannot expunge the theology and retain the morality. You cannot make the starting-point of the Epistle to the Galatians at the end of chapter v.—the culture of the fruits—and ignore or renounce the previous chapters, which contain the root. Why, if the Epistle to the Galatians means anything at all, it is a passionate appeal and warning to men, out of whose minds the primary truth was fading, and in whose lives moral enthusiasm was declining. They had begun their religious life in the "power" of the Gospel. The great truths of "the cleansing" had energised them with healthy, moral passion. "Ye did run well!" Why, then, this panting, this fainting, this reluctance, this slow indifferent step, this moral "lack"? They had "forgotten the cleansing"! We are to be able to "stand"—firm, strong, and irresistible—when our loins are "girt about with truth." But if we take off the belt, if we ignore it, if we renounce it, the soul loses its vigour, it sinks into moral laxity, and becomes sluggish, undecided, and limp.

We have abundant confirmation of the sequence in the history of the Christian centuries. The principle is this—dethrone the cleansing, and you chill the passion for perfectness ; exalt the cleansing, and moral enthusiasm becomes abounding. Go back to the years which preceded the emergence of the Protestant faith. A sacerdotal ceremonialism had eclipsed the gospel of cleansing. Religious life was corrupt and corrupting, because the interpreters of religion had lost the key. The Christian doctrine of grace was obliterated and forgotten. With the doctrine of grace there had gone into oblivion the companion doctrine of sin. Grace being exiled, graces became scant. The great cleansing was forgotten. The sense of sin was dulled. Shame died. Morality became sluggish and unclean. The sequence of forgetfulness was lack. Protestantism tore down the ceremonial veil. It brushed aside the obscuring legends. It rediscovered and reaffirmed the doctrine of grace. It published anew the gospel of " the cleansing." " First of all, Christ died for our sins." " We are reconciled to God by the death of His Son." " In

Christ we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins." That was the primary burden of Protestantism. And what was the issue? Conscience was quickened. The sense of sin was revived. The chilled passion for perfectness was rekindled and reinflamed. Reformation became an enthusiasm. Out of Protestantism came Puritanism—ay, came as natural in its emergence as the emergence of the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth chapters of Romans from the great body of cardinal, primary truth which precedes them; and whatever one might say about Puritanism, however severely critics may disparage it for its supposed narrowness, let it be remembered that it was the narrowness of power, a healthy recoil from the impotence of diffuseness—the narrowness of the mill-stream, a concentration for more abundant labours in the service of God and man. Protestantism made Puritanism. A revitalised theology created a re-empowered and impassioned morality.

Now, come down the generations to the early years of the eighteenth century. Primary truth had again become obscured. The great cleansing was forgotten. The creed of the Puritans was erased, and had ceased to be a controlling and pervading factor in the consciousness of the personal life. With the obliteration of cardinal truth there came the disparagement of the ten commandments. The current of moral life ran slow and unclean. The entire nation was possessed by the laxity. Our prominent statesmen were notoriously and grossly impure. Literature had lost its wings, and no longer soared into the ideal. The masses of the people were ignorant, brutal, and debased. They had "forgotten the cleansing," and the sequence was a terrible "lack." Then came the early Methodists with the great awakening. What was the message which effected the rousing? The exiled gospel, the obliterated truth, the forgotten cleansing. "First of all, Christ died for our sins." Grace! Sin! Faith! Life! These were the projecting emphases around which gathered the speech of the evangelical revival. Says George Whitfield in his journal: "This sermon, under God, began the awakening at Gloucester, Bristol, and London." And what was the sermon about? "The nature and necessity of regeneration in Christ." The sermon which forms the introductory discourse in John Wesley's published volumes of theology reveals the keynote of his extraordinary ministry. These men uncovered the veiled and buried truth; they proclaimed the great doctrines of "the cleansing," and from the moors of wild Northumberland to the more genial haunts of Cornwall and Devon vast multitudes of men and women turned their faces heavenward, recoiling from the uncleanness in which they wallowed, in a passionate longing for the purity and sweetness of the Lord.

Come further down the centuries to our immediate time. What is the religious phenomenon of our own day which remains undimmed even when placed by the side of the great evangelical revival? Is it an illegitimate emphasis to ascribe that glory to the Salvation Army? What is it that confronts us when we open our eyes? A vast army of men and women distributed all over the world, the majority of whom were in the grip of the vulgarest devils, morally barren and unfruitful, sin-soaked and spirit-bound, but who are now rejoicing in a passionate hunger for holiness and truth. How do you account for it? Here they are, round about us in our land, men and women with an enthusiasm for self-denial which puts the more reputable Church to shame; men and women who were once grovelling in the mire, but who are now fitted to take their place by the sea of glass, among the vast multitude who have "gotten the victory over the beast." What is the secret of the great awakening? The remembrance of the great cleansing! All intermediaries, both of ritual and tradition, have been brushed aside, and they have been brought face to face with "the blood of the cleansing," with the unspeakable grace and love of the reconciling Lord.

> Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
> In my place condemned He stood,
> Sealed my pardon with His blood.

That is the secret of the Salvation Army, and from that secret proceeds the passionate moral energy which by abundant labours is serving the ends of the world.

This has been the secret power of the Christian centuries, and its submergence has been the explanation of all moral decline. Exalt the doctrines of grace, and you create the hunger for God. Let the truths of the cleansing be received and vividly retained, and graces will spring in abundance. Let this realisation possess the personal consciousness, "He loved me, and gave Himself for me," and the realisation will itself create a moral energy which will exultingly declare, "I *can* do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." But let the great truths be erased or ignored—let the cleansing be forgotten, and forgetfulness will issue in lack, moral enthusiasm will sink into indifference, into an apathetic contentment with the unclean ways and fashions of the world.

"Forgetfulness of the cleansing"; moral laxity. What is the ultimate issue? "Blindness." What we cease to crave for we cease to see. When moral passion cools, moral ideals fade, or we see "only what is near." We become near-sighted, weak-sighted, blind to the things that are afar off. We lose the vision of the ideal, the heavenly, the eternal. We see only what is near, the earthly and the temporal. When the passion for perfection becomes lukewarm and cold, we become more concerned with postures than with depositions, with temporalities more than with spiritualities, with a good living more than a good life. We see only what is near, and are blind to that which is afar off. Foreign missions, if they appeal to us at all, appeal as the ministries of a more extended commerce, the pioneers in the creation of multiplied centres of trade. We are blind to the heavenly and the divine. The work of the Lord presents itself as a nice expediency, and not as a glorious and tremendous privilege and obligation. We cannot see! Life, having lost its background, loses its foreground. Having lost the saving truth, we lose the ideal. Forgetting "the cleansing," we become blind. We become dominated by the earthly, and the heavenly becomes as an impotent fiction lost somewhere in the encircling mists.

That is the order and succession of this appalling degeneracy,—forgetfulness of grace, moral laxity, lost ideal. Turn the matter round. If we are to see clearly, if we are to behold the heavenly, to appreciate it, to be responsive to the allurements of the ideal and the eternal, our moral life must be a passionate enthusiasm, and for a passionate enthusiasm the consciousness needs to be possessed by the great energising truths of the cleansing. Is it here that we are wanting? In this great matter of Christian missions have we clear sight? Do we see them as the Lord sees them? Do we see the ideal and the heavenly, and does it allure? Or do we only see the things that are near? Have we forgotten the cleansing? The conditions of power remain unchanged. Let us get nearer the springs. Let us reaffirm the great cleansing. Let us startle the world with surprises of grace. "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of Him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace." "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned."

XX

THE SECRETS OF EFFECTIVE PREACHING

An Address on preaching delivered before the Free Church Congress, Cardiff, March 1901.

I AM happy to think that in the discharge of the duty which I have undertaken to-day there are two things which, even if I possessed them, would be sorely and painfully out of place. This is no occasion for the artifices of a swelling rhetoric, nor does our subject afford any welcome to the exercises of jesting. When a body of men is assembled for the purpose of considering the apparent inefficacy of their preaching, the proper atmosphere for such deliberations is to be found, not in the light excitabilities of a public meeting, but in the deep and awe-inspiring solemnities of public worship. We must approach the great theme in the attitude of groping supplicants, and not with the presumptuous steps of detached and distant critics. We shall see further if we are upon our knees. Our vision may be intensified by penitential tears. Our questions must be asked in the spirit of eager worship. Our self-examination must be made in the light of His countenance. We must "inquire in His temple."

The preacher, what is he? Behind the one word "preacher" of the New Testament Scriptures there are half a dozen original words, each with its own distinctive suggestion, each contributing its own item of colour to the description of the mighty office. The preacher is a *herald*, a public crier, a man with an imperial proclamation, charged with a message which must be announced from the house-tops with all the urgency of a sovereign command. The preacher is an *evangelist*, with a message which is almost a song, full of sweetness and of light, the speech of the wooer, laden with tenderness, and bright with the promise of gladsome days. The preacher is a *logician*, engaged in strenuous reasonings, seeking to gather together the loose and incoherent thoughts of men, and bind them into firm and well-knit spiritual decision. And the preacher is a *conversationalist*, who sometimes lays aside the spacious function of the public minister, and, discarding the formalities of linked and well-connected discourse, engages in homely intercourse, in fireside speech with his fellow-men Such is the variously coloured office which lies behind the complex and suggestive word "preacher." We must take the essential significances of a king's herald, a tender wooer, a strong logician, and a familiar friend, and in their wealthy combination we shall obtain a vision of the ideal preacher of the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The preacher, what is his function? Let us rehearse a classic passage from the Epistle to the Romans. "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" Reverse the order of the sequence. How then runs the vital procession? Preaching, hearing, believing, calling, saving! What are the extreme terms of the series? Preaching, saving. The ultimate aim of all true preaching is the salvation of men. Salvation from what? Salvation from sin? Yes. Salvation from hell? Yes. Salvation from infirmity? Yes. From moral stuntedness and spiritual immaturity? Yes. From all arrested growth in the direction of the divine? Yes. The strenuous purpose of all vital preaching is to lift men out of the bondage of sin and dwarfhood, and to set them in the fine spacious air and light of the free-born children of God.

1. Now, here let us begin our quest into the comparative inefficacy of our preaching, and may the Holy Spirit illumine for us the secret chambers of our life. *Do we keenly realise the horrors of the bondage from which we seek to deliver men?* Has sin become a commonplace? Does it no longer fill us with poignant pain? Has it shed some of its loathsomeness, and has our repulsion been relaxed? Can we now toy with terrors before which our fathers shrank aghast? The questions are surely not altogether irrelevant, and may be warranted by many of the conditions in which we are placed. There is proceeding in our time a certain toning-down of language, which may be wise or unwise, but which is not altogether without suggestion. We do not like some of the stern, bare, jagged words which our fathers used in their description of sin. And so we are very busy filing and smoothing the sharp edges, and diluting their somewhat loud and glaring colour. I am not afraid of changes in phraseology if the change do not indicate a degeneracy from decisive strength into a mincing dilettantism. The substituted word may be more cultured and refined, but if its

content be thin and impoverished, I am afraid of the change. "Vile and full of sin I am." The word "vile" may offend my ears, but what is the reason of the offence? When I see the excision of the word "vile," and the substitution of the word "weak," I am afraid of the tendency, because it seems to suggest a relaxing of our conceptions of the enormity of sin. "A guilty, poor, and helpless worm, on Thy kind arms I fall." I may not like the severe and humbling term "worm," but what is the reason of my dislike? Is it that I have acquired a less stringent conception of sin, and are these graphic terms too bold and severe? Do we require a milder phraseology because our enemy is less appalling? Is the yearning for more exquisite refinement the expression of spiritual culture and growth, or is it the evidence of partial benumbment? The answer must be found in the secret places of the individual life.

There is a fountain filled with blood
  Drawn from Emmanuel's veins;
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
  Lose all their guilty stains.

I tell you frankly I don't like the figure which runs through the verse. There are many to whom it is almost offensive. Its elaboration creates almost a repulsion. But while I dislike the figure, I want my dislike to be safe and illumined. If I drop the particular phraseology, I want to retain the tremendous sense of sin which lies behind it. If I refine the word, I don't want to gild the sin. If I obtain a more cultured vehicle, I want it to express the same horrible and loathsome presence. I covet no phraseology which will lend respectability to sin. It is possible to obtain finer poetry at the expense of convicting power. We may intensify the polish and glitter and lose the lightning. Polished and dilettante speech will not satisfy us if we are profoundly held by a sense of the exceeding bitterness and loathsomeness of sin. Does that sense pervade our preaching? Do we impress the people with the feeling that we are dealing with trifles, or with blinding and appalling enormities? There is a word in the Book of Ezekiel which often rings through my soul when I am preparing the message for my people. "And he called to the man clothed with linen, which had the writer's inkhorn by his side; and the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry, for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof." "Set a mark upon all that sigh and that cry" for the sin of the city. Upon how many of our foreheads would the man with the inkhorn set his mark? "That sigh!" It is a secret pain. It expresses itself in involuntary sighs. Whenever the thought crosses the mind, it throws a cold shadow over the heart. "And when He beheld the city, He wept over it." "And that cry." It shapes and colours their prayers. You can find their profound sense of the world's sin in the nature of their supplications. They cannot keep it out of their prayers. Are we so crushed and burdened by the horrors of sin? Is it the staple of our prayers? Is it the burden of our sighs? Does it ever cause the loss of an hour's sleep? Or is sin an unaffrighting and undisturbing commonplace with which we have become so familiar that it never startles us into pain? If sin has become a commonplace, our preaching has become a plaything. If we do not feel its horrors, we shall lose the startling clarion of the watchman. There will be no urgency in our speech, no vehemence, no sense of imperious haste. If we think lightly of the disease, we shall loiter on the way to the physician. If we do not feel the heat of the consuming and destructive presence, we shall not labour, with undivided zeal, to pluck our fellow-men as brands from the burning. If our sense of sin is lax, we may find in that laxity one of the causes of ineffective preaching.

2. *Are we possessed of a spirit of sensitive sympathy?* I am not surprised that in his enumeration of the graces of a sanctified life the Apostle should put in the primary place a heart of pity. "Put ye on compassion." It is part of the essential equipment of every true preacher of the gospel of Christ, and it is a part of our equipment which may be most easily and perilously destroyed. It is one of the gravest perils of the Christian ministry that we are in such continuous and imminent danger of losing the power of our compassion. When first I entered the Christian ministry I used to have a wondering fear whether my untried faith would be able to bear continual revelations of suffering and sorrow and bereavement and death. Would my sensitive sympathy engender painful doubt and encourage spiritual revolt? But now the problem has been altogether changed. The searching question is not now whether my faith can persist through continued manifestations of the darker experiences of life, but whether my faith can keep alive through a calm and undisturbing familiarity with them. We have to be familiar with experiences whose

infrequent visits bring benediction and softening influence to others. That which makes the rainy season in other lives constitutes our drought. An infrequent contact with sorrow may enrich the compassions; constant familiarity with it tends to dry them up. In my early ministry my heart used to melt at every funeral over which I had to preside. I could not read the burial service without tears. It may be that it is part of the gracious ministry of God that with the process of the years this burden should be eased, but I do not want the ease if it means the loss of a sensitive compassion. I would rather covet the tears, and the choked speech, and a body tired and drained twice and thrice a week, than enter into a familiarity with sorrow which estranges me from the sore and stricken hearts of my fellow-men. If our compassion fail, our power is gone. If we do not feel with our fellows, we shall never be their guide. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am nothing." If I lose my sympathy, I lose my vision. Sympathy is the parent of discernment; the finer the sympathy, the more exquisite the discernment. "When he was yet a long way off, his father saw him." That is the kind of vision which as a preacher I covet: the fine, sensitive sympathy which can discern the first faint stirrings in a brother man's heart when he is just inclining towards the divine. Before the divine movement in his soul is expressed in speech, before it is even registered in his face, nay, when the face indicates rather a sterner revolt than an incipient surrender, when the man is yet "a long way off," I want to feel the remote awakening by the power of an exquisite compassion. If men can feel that we know their very breathings, and that we thrill to the deepest and most secret movements of their spirits, they will suffer us to be their guides and friends. But if our compassions are dried, our people will know our benumbment, and our preaching will fall like a shower of hard gravel rather than as a shower of soft and refreshing rain. If our familiarity with the shadow has impoverished our compassion, let us get the stream renewed. "In His love and in His pity He redeemed them." A reverent intimacy with the Lord will deliver us from the hardening influence of ceaseless familiarity with grief. He will "come down like rain." He will "open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys." "The desert shall become a pool, and the dry land springs of water." If we have lost our sensitive sympathy, we may find in the loss some explanation of our ineffective preaching.

3. *Is the wooing note present in our preaching?* —If we do not realise the horrors of sinful bondage, and sympathise with the bound, the tender notes of the lover and the wooer will be absent from our speech. Is not our preaching too unbrokenly severe? Is there not too much that savours of the judgment-seat, and too little that breathes the winsomeness of the fireside? "Out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings." Yes; but out of the throne there proceeded also "a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal," the soft, tender, healing, sustaining influences of grace. I think that in our teaching and preaching the thunder and lightning are apt to be more frequently conspicuous than the gracious shining river. We want more tenderness in our speech, the tones of love and of sensitive yearning. We want less scolding and more pleading, less driving and more wooing. "*Compel* them to come in." I am glad that the somewhat harsh word has been excised from the Revised Version, and that in its place we have the soft and welcome word "constrain." "*Constrain* them to come in." Woo them into the kingdom! Go back to your wooing days; think

of all the little devices—all of them legitimate—employed in order to woo the affections of the one you loved. Think, too, of the little tendernesses paid, all the kindly abounding services rendered, when even the flickering response seemed to be a repulse. How you multiplied your attentions and nursed the gracious awakening! Every great preacher is a wooer. If we turn to the Old Testament Scriptures, we might expect the wooing note to be absent. Amos is severe in speech, stern in expostulations, multiplying his denunciations, yet you find that even stern, thundering Amos sometimes lays aside his thunder and begins to woo. And as for Hosea, he is the wooer from beginning to end. Turn to Isaiah, and at the end of the chapter in which there is poured out abounding denunciation and woe you will find that he lays it all aside and begins with, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people." He was a great wooer. We need to woo our people. "Jesus, lover of my soul." Preacher, lover of man's soul! Let us speak a little more tenderly. Let us drop out the thunder and put in the constraint, and where the thunder has failed the lover may succeed. Not only in the Old Testament Scriptures, but right through the Bible, you will find this wooing and constraining note. I am perfectly sure it has been too absent from my ministry. Months ago I determined that there should be more of the tender lover in my pulpit speech, more of the wooing note of the Apostle Paul, more of the gentleness and tender constraint of my Lord.

4. Let me ask one other question. *Has our teaching and preaching the New Testament emphasis?* You think I ought to put that first. I do not want to put it first, and I will tell you why. I do not want to give it undue emphasis, lest I appear to suspect my brethren. I do not think they are far away from the great cardinal verities of the Christian faith. I believe they are very near the centre, and they keep to what they conceive to be the primary realities of our religion. But even though we be agreed upon it in our own practice, there is no harm just here to re-emphasise our belief and practice. Wherever in the Scriptures the preacher has to proclaim great and imperative duty, it always finds its root very near to the Cross. When the Apostle Paul is proclaiming what appears to be a commonplace duty, he goes back for the roots right to Calvary's Tree. " Husbands, love your wives, *even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it.*" And if he is talking about the eating of meats,

he proclaims his injunction from the Cross. "Destroy not him with thy meat *for whom Christ died.*" When he is proclaiming a duty he links it to the Crucifixion, to the crucified Christ. He drives all his duties home with the power of the Gospel of the crucified Christ. All his tools are armed with one handle. I do not know anything more ineffective and more provoking than to have a gimlet with no handle to it. You cannot drive a pricker far without a handle, and you cannot get a gimlet into the wood without a handle; and you cannot drive a duty, you cannot prick man's conscience to the very core, unless you handle the duty as Paul handled it, and drive it home by the power of the crucified Christ. And, therefore, I put the searching question, Have we got that emphasis in our teaching, and do we make it quite clear and apparent? When we have proclaimed a duty, is the dynamic just as manifest? When we present an ideal, are the resources as conspicuous? Do we link all our imperatives to the power of the Gospel of Christ?

One other question, and I have done. My brethren in the ministry, do we appreciate our own message? Do we look as though we revelled in it? There is nothing so helps a man to a good meal as to sit down with a man who enjoys a good appetite. And there is nothing so alluring to people, when we desire to show them how gracious the Lord is, as to let them see we revel in the diet. "Blessed is the man whose delight is in the law of the Lord." And why is he blessed? Because his delight is contagious, his enthusiasm is catching. When we see a man bubbling over and delighting in God, we ourselves begin to be unsealed. A minister's enthusiasm will be found contagious among his people. "Thy word is sweet." When we say it, do we look as if we knew it? "Thy word is sweet." Do we proclaim the sentence with a sour face? "My meditation of Him shall be sweet." When our people see that we delight in the feast, they will sit down at the same table.

Let us, in conclusion, subject ourselves to a rigorous cross-examination. Do I hate all sin? "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil." Do I feel sin to be loathsome? Am I possessed of a tender sensitiveness, that can discern even the faintest movings in the hearts of my people, and which will reveal to me their inclinations long before they receive any outward expression? And, Lord Jesus, have I been a wooer, a lover, and are any in Thy kingdom because they were just enticed into it by the tender persuasiveness of my life and speech? And have I linked the proclamation of duties to the love of Calvary? And has my teaching had New Testament perspective and proportion, and have I evinced delight in my own message? May the Good Lord grant that to all these great questions we may be able to give an affirmative response!

THE END

Brin
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